



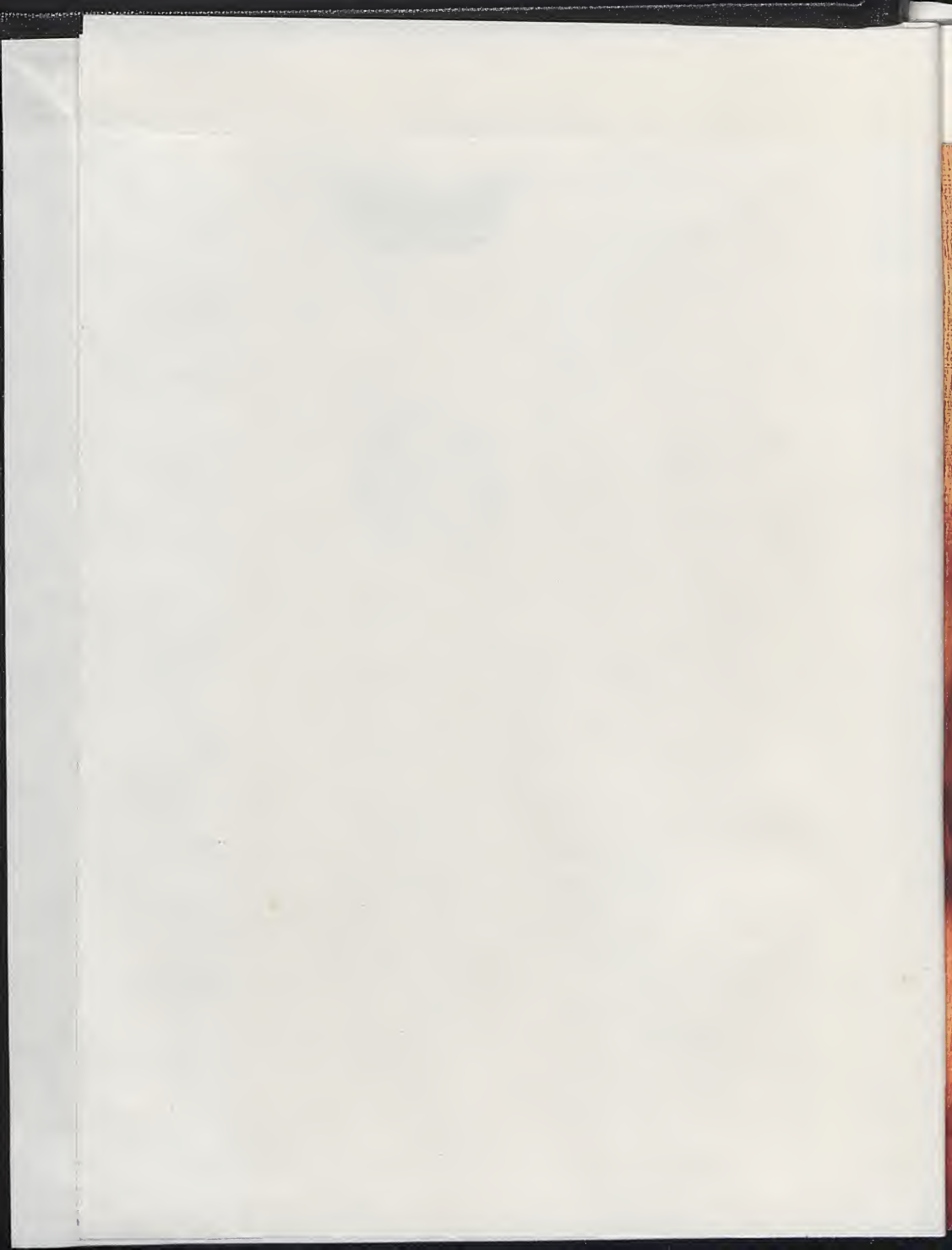
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**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**





THE HUMAN SOUL WEIGHS  
THREE TO FOUR OUNCES.

-DON DELLILLO, *AMERICANA*

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# THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

Fall 1996

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## Contents

### Art/Photography

Untitled.....	Anne Sloan.....	7
Untitled.....	Aaron Tanimoto.....	8
Scream.....	Lorin Hord.....	13
Untitled.....	Anne Sloan.....	14
Untitled.....	Jen Henderson.....	21
Ritelin.....	Lorin Hord.....	22
Untitled.....	Anne Sloan.....	31
Untitled.....	Anderson Williams.....	32
Untitled.....	Anderson Williams.....	41
Untitled.....	Aaron Tanimoto.....	42
Camouflage.....	Terry Tracey.....	45
Untitled.....	Anne Sloan.....	46

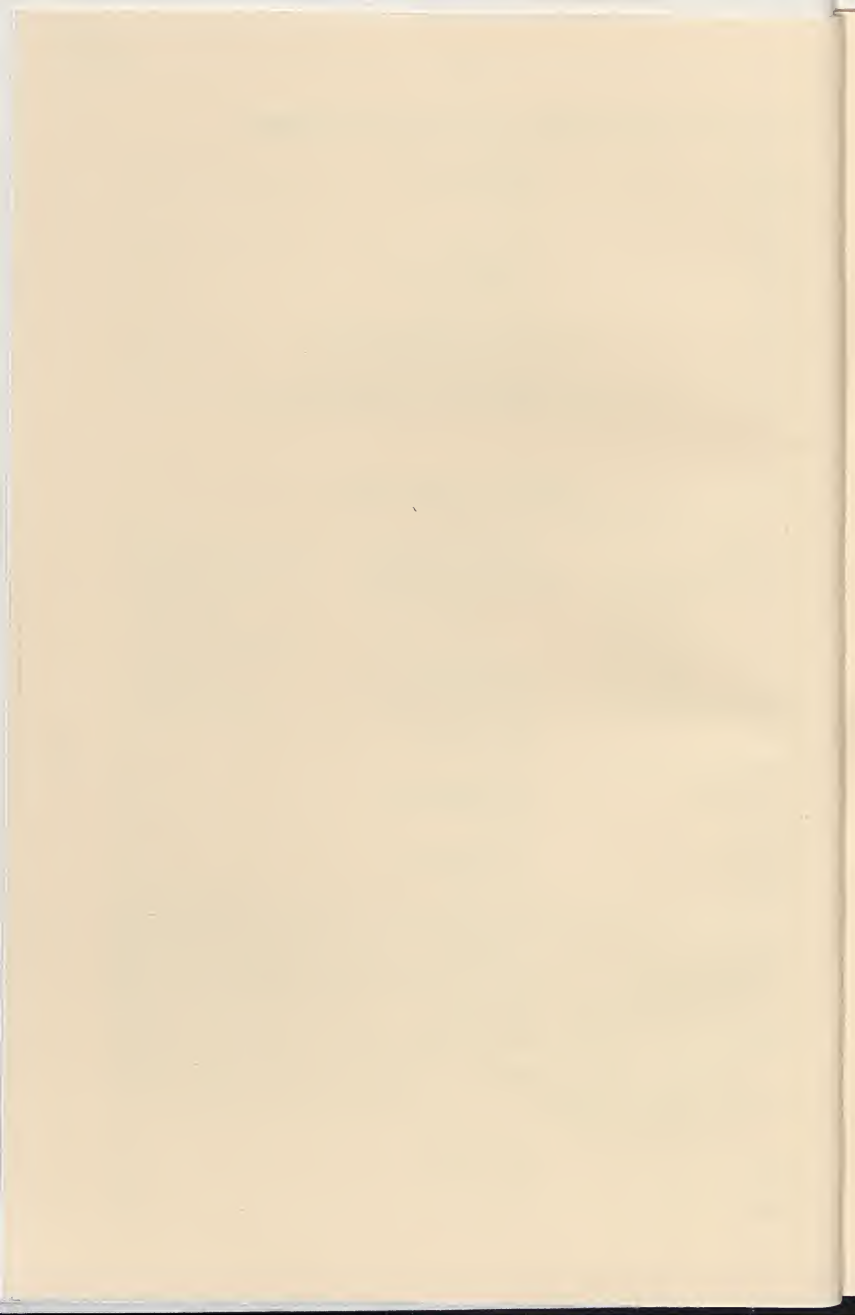
### Prose

Praecipere.....	Paul Fyfe.....	9
Never Eat Beans Before a Date and Other Advice I Have Given.....	Joseph Golden.....	18
there for you.....	Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.....	26
Untitled.....	Erika Viltz.....	33
in the grip of THE MAN.....	Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.....	47

### Poetry

after J.C. ....	Jason McEnaney.....	5
Bonsai Baby.....	Timothy Tickle.....	6
substance of generation.....	Rachel Childs.....	11
Messiah.....	Natalie Penland.....	12
lament (for g.g and others).....	Ben Smith.....	12
To Grandfather.....	Karen Coachman.....	15
In God We Trust.....	Taylor Harris.....	16
skyscraper.....	Ben Smith.....	17
Epinfiny.....	Paul Fyfe.....	19
math lessons.....	Rachel Childs.....	20
Untitled.....	Brian Potter.....	23
hunan poem.....	Knox Robinson.....	24
reunion.....	Rachel Childs.....	29
The Natives.....	Ben Smith.....	30
metronome.....	Jason McEnaney.....	36
where the doubt begins.....	evan.....	37
King's grill, three decades later.....	Rachel Childs.....	38
Me and the Rain.....	Timothy Tickle.....	39
Watercolors: A Consummation ~for Anne.....	OEH.....	40
Monologue of King Lear Standing on a LogContemplating His Underwear.....	Shake McSppeare.....	43
mother.....	Kerry Espinola.....	44
A Day's Excursion.....	Kerry Espinola.....	49
Wish.....	Paul Fyfe.....	50





*after J.C.*

At eight years old I began to shine shoes  
on the corner of 69th and Lexington.

I built myself a bench so I could sit.  
I had two metal rods the length of my legs, you know.

To start, I had a rag, a frayed toothbrush  
and a jar of watery black polish.

I mixed it myself.

I'll never forget my first shine.  
When I was through

the man looked down at me and said  
*Son, my shoes look fantastic*

*but when I came here I had white socks.*  
I couldn't look up.

His coin fell into my cigar box.  
A shine was a nickel, he threw me a dime.

Jason McEnaney

**Bonsai Baby**

pluck 'em young  
still crisp and fresh  
and bind them  
roots real tight.  
as they grow -control.  
twist an arm, lop off hands, bend backs to a stoop  
then  
confine movement.  
Soon  
you show them the world,  
placed on a table  
hunched over, it will stand,  
as a bruised mouth  
will toothless grin  
and whisper how beautiful.

Timothy Tickle



Anne Sloan



Aaron Tanimoto



## Praecipere

Paul Fyfe

I never think of it as a process of age, although it seems to arrive with a progress of difficult revelations. I was only sitting on the grass when she walked by. I wanted nothing, believe me, but it was something in the way she stared; not like a personal examination of shapes, or interest in captivating form, or an aesthetic event, but a questioning, almost slighting glare. I wanted to get inside of her head and show her myself, but seemingly unfeasible, I resigned to let her pass.

I got up to walk across that field and started thinking of what she might have told me. I don't think that she had a message, but a statement. I wondered if it was postmarked and weighed. I wondered at the packaging and the contents. My metaphors carried me to the woods.

Standing near the stream, I tried to picture what she thought; I wanted to think in moods. I could see myself plainly enough, without much animosity towards a particular position I might have been holding; brushing away the impositions of admittance and allowing breezes of fiction to position themselves in my head. Sometimes I would take them myself and turn them over, shifting the picture into a more suitable frame.

I doubt the sudden importance of a particular event, but entrenched in ungingiv correspondences had left me stained with residual dialectic. The sounds of the water were pleasant and the gracious breeze sufficed to create a mood. I tried to relax. I shut my eyes.

*A young boy is sitting on the ground, legs spread before him out of his diaper, and playing with several polishless rocks. He has them all in his hands and grinds them together with glee. They crunch and shift and he giggles. He scrapes and molds nothing and delights in it all. His eyes are bright. His hands are full.*

I opened my eyes. The greenery met me again. It was a nice picture but didn't quite satisfy the project I intended. Even if it was perfect there were problems. I felt a little pity for the child after a short smile. That couldn't have been it. How could she have seen that when I was here, as before, myself? I thought that I should have asked her a question, cutting distance to the bone, hinting at skeletal whiteness. What else was there? A look like that must have encompassed many visions and as much reflection. But why so opinionated? I stopped my discourse and listened to the soft water and the malleable leaves. I shut my eyes again.

*A man is bracing the earth in a violent gray cave. He is soundlessly screaming against the blasting drone of gargantuan stone above his head. His hands are furiously pushing the massive fragments of coarse grey rock ever*

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

*shifting to maintain the precious bowl of space threatening to collapse on him. His mouth is suddenly twisted away from him in apocalyptic grimace. He is standing through himself, fighting with every drop of life, straining with hatred and shifting with terror and revolt against the frenzied sea of stone above his upturned quivering eyes. His skin is pulled to limits. He fights without any.*

I looked around my locale without expression. It wasn't giving me any belligerent sentiments. It wasn't menacing. Neither was she for that matter. I could have struck upon introduction, but it wasn't at all necessary. I seemed to know that she didn't think any of this, but was affected nonetheless. I thought that my demeanor was passive and reposed in an idle resistance to the currents of existence; feeling a wash and observing the same. I was not angry.

I walked back through the woods to the green field and looked again at my former position. I stared at the place I had sat and slowly walked by with an imitated sneer. I didn't break my gaze until I noticed that she was coming up behind me. I stopped walking to look at her. She returned my stare and maintained her brisk pace and passed directly by me without breaking eye contact. She did not strain to look over her shoulder as I continued to regard her progress. She was expressionless; she looked like nothing behind her eyes. There was no hint of malice. I turned back to see the patch of grass where I had been sitting and realized that I still held my empty disapproving glare.

**substance of generation**

she's dangerous, even to herself. the watergames we played  
proved her underwater dexterity a long time ago: like a seal, she'd flip  
past the enemy  
and hold her breath longer than anybody else ... but then again, did she ever  
breathe at all?

days of poolplay are over now and though i  
can't help but wonder what she means when she writes

“i’m going under”

i still see her, vibrant and laughing and pink-faced  
from so much sun and chlorine: three thousand miles  
away is enough to try even the best of friends but i hope she  
knows that sometimes i still sit at the edge of the pool

wondering if she can get away this time:

if she will evade her enemies with the same ease

and if through all her sadness i will see that sleek-wet hair and the long-lashed giggling eyes emerge at the surface soon:

i'm breathing for her, from far away, so she had better not go under just yet,

because somewhere at the other end of this pool i have a hand out, awaiting the moment of her safety.

Rachel Childs

**Messiah**

If only as I stare now  
into the bottom of my near empty mug,  
the answer would float up from the foam  
letters would bubble and shift into the  
magic secret-  
the breath of God rises in stale fumes.

Natalie Penland

**lament (for g.g and others)**

teething concrete disc-eyed tumult crash-haired  
blurrhy mind a metal chrome and purple  
fleshy heart and steal so hard  
as red as hard as bones

Ben Smith



Lorin Hord





Anne Sloan

### To Grandfather

These dates are what you ate  
in the desert—  
It was Africa, wasn't it?  
Where you painted that memory  
of the arrangement of tents.

Those hands, borrowed for war,  
paused for a moment  
and coaxed innocent pigment  
into playing with light.

I've memorized those hands.

Mit-like, olive skinned,  
expertly molded to cradle a brush.  
I think of them now,  
under a blanket with you,  
folded and patient.

Karen Coachman

**In God We Trust**

sleep on it  
58 24 58  
north south  
    ...sarengeti...  
bridge ices  
before road  
historic business district  
    ...it isn't fair...  
void in puerto rico  
this road is dedicated  
as adult relaxation  
main gate fast and  
friendly  
just in emeralds diamonds  
gold gold gold same as  
cash  
hix motors hooker's seafood  
258 24  
north west  
"come ride with us"  
    ...Jesus Saves.

Taylor Harris

skysc  
raper (dedicated to Samuel Beckett)

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e>aph  
asia\*  
ignor  
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!@.;\

Ben Smith

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### Never Eat Beans Before a Date and Other Advice I Have Given

Joseph Golden

If you don't want to get bit by the lion, keep your ass out the cage. Give your respect to everyone and everything, give your disrespect to those who deserve it. You are equal to no one, no one is better than you, but that doesn't make you better than anyone. Sometimes the best way to be nice to people is to not get to know them. Tell the truth. Never go out of your way to hurt people, they will come to you. Trust your boys with everything but your women and your money, accidents happen. Give someone you don't know more credit than they give you. Always do what works for you. Do what you do for God. Expectations are another way to limit yourself. Ego is evil. Pride ruined the devil. The only thing you cannot do is live forever. Self esteem is a reaction to what other people think about you. Surround yourself with people who hold your best interest next to their own, you'll have fewer friends, but they will always be there. Never break your back for someone unless you can go without a thank you. Unspoken understanding is the best way to kill a friendship. Most friendships are not give and take. Sometimes a friend is the one who does all the listening. If you do something wrong and get away with it, don't tell anyone. Always talk about what you know, that way you seem knowledgeable and you're less likely to lie. If you have nothing nice to say, write it down. You'll get enough sleep in the grave. Excessive sleep is the best excuse for not getting things done. Learn how to rest. Get in where you fit in! The most fun you'll have won't be where she isn't. Don't take everything someone offers you. Just because somebody gives you something doesn't make them your friend. If she is worth having she is worth working for. Pain is temporary, regret is forever. You'll never know if you don't try. The only thing that comes to those who wait is death, but death also comes to those who go out and seek it. If you're stanking and you know it wash your ass, \*clap clap.\* Never eat beans before a date. If it feels good do it again and again and again.... If you need an example, don't look at the ones who have made it, look at the ones who haven't and don't do what they did. Shit happens or you can make shit happen. Don't follow if you don't have to. Burnout is the goal, you get nowhere idling. If you aren't tired, you aren't doing something right. Make them understand. People in glass houses can't mess with you, they can't get naked either. It is time to do laundry when you run out of clean underwear. Experience will teach you that it is less painful to learn from other people's experiences. Don't believe in luck, believe in God, luck will disappoint you. Don't listen to your heart, it is subject to whims and impulses, listen to your intellect, it is based on what is true and what is false. Do not eat green eggs and ham. Seek truth always, if you find it, you are wrong. Don't listen to me, I'm crazy.



**Epinfiny**

I  
first  
realized  
I  
was  
made  
of  
plastic  
when  
my  
mouth  
broke.

Paul Fyfe

**math lessons**

some angry kid sneers at me through the windshield  
and makes as if to key my car but i don't slow down  
and ashiya doesn't notice                      skinny-kneed and  
half outta her seatbelt gripping her 5th donut singing  
times tables out loud out the window  
to the crack houses the barber shops the old  
sad men playing checkers on the porch she  
sings about anything  
short fingernails plastered in blue glitter she's  
bouncing off the seat. i watch the  
toddler in the street barefoot on fried asphalt crying  
and we're half into her driveway. 'shiya grinning says bye  
gives me a sticky donut hug  
and flies through the yard on sugar-high wings  
her screen door slams and the  
lesson's over but i can't stop counting on my fingers

Rachel Childs



Jen Henderson

*THREE TO FOUR OUNCES*



Lorin Hord

**Untitled**

if I left  
just left  
sometime I'll just  
leave I'll  
leave the dishes  
those books I never  
wanted to read in the first place  
the bags of junk food stuffed  
crumpled behind my bed—  
I'd leave all the  
the postcards and play tickets I've  
saved for no reason  
the concert tees I've worn so many  
times they don't fit anymore  
the ball I caught at Yankee Stadium  
back when baseball actually mattered—  
I'd leave this taste in my  
mouth I'd just  
leave

Brian Potter

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### hunan poem

all i can see of Hunan  
is seen from this train  
going faster than i think  
it is  
the window  
    halfway open.

it is enough to see homes  
of red brick walls and curved tile roofs  
rise up from flat land and verdant slopes  
like almost-nature;

impossible fields claim even vertical planes.  
all of it divided  
by small walls.

this land rich with no money  
grows rice shooting out like clusters of emeralds  
in the dark nightsoil  
and i find my ninth grade geography  
is likewise fertilized:

*terrace agriculture*

knew but now see  
what it means.

*arable*

this land is arable.

through the window  
    halfway open  
there are people  
standing in road or in field;  
some look up at the train  
as it rattles through their lives  
    too fast or too slow.



i know these people  
 to be Chinese people.  
 they think certain Chinese thoughts  
 and have specific Chinese lives.  
 there exists a certain impulse to say  
     *these people have been standing there*  
     *on the walls separating rice paddies*  
     *for 5000 Chinese years.*

i will never know  
 Chinese thought Chinese life  
 or the meaning of one Chinese year.  
 i will never know  
 a Chinese person  
 because the window  
     halfway open  
 is not enough to see  
 inside the mud stained dwellings  
     to taste the food the people eat  
     to read a grandmother's blind smile  
     to know how they measure days or seasons  
         or how they touch each other  
         in the darkness of a Hunan night.

the window  
     halfway open  
 keeps the people      those people  
 keeps them      Chinese  
 keeps them standing in rice paddies for 5000 years.

i want to know Hunan's rusty earth  
 but my language is not strong enough  
 the window is only  
     halfway open  
 and the train is moving  
         too fast.

Knox Robinson

there for you

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

I spoke with her on Saturday afternoon, before I found out that her boyfriend Wade had died. She recounted a few bits of gossip from her job at the Mark Antony Hotel, and finally said that she'd like to get together with me. I thought she said that for lack of anything else to fill our conversation, so I told her I was rather busy that week. But also I said that I was here for her if she needed somebody to talk to, although I wasn't even sure about that. I'd called her in the first place because I'd been having troubles with my own girlfriend and wanted a few words of advice or else vacuous encouragement, but it seemed selfish to demand her ear without offering my own.

I found out that Wade had died that evening on a flickering 8-inch TV set. He'd OD'd last night, cocaine. He'd been using progressively heavier drugs and had friends who could score anything he wanted. Some nights I'd see him at Garo's Coffeehouse after the shows and he'd be so zoned that he couldn't carry on an intelligible conversation, but he and his friends insisted that he knew what he was doing. "If it becomes too heavy, they can stop me," Wade said, with a wave of his hand toward the assorted miscreants. The word "overdose" had never been a factor.

He'd always seemed immortal. I remember one party he bragged from the outset that nobody could keep up with him. He outpaced everybody else on the bong two hits to one, all the while laughing in their face and saying, "I have it, man." He drove home that night, and although two people who'd been there got busted for driving under the influence, Wade was not one of them.

Yeah, Wade would live forever, as far as the rest of us could tell. Some people were destined for success, and Wade certainly fell into that privileged group. A hush would fall over the party when Wade stepped in, and all the kids would make room for him as though it were a play. And he'd perform for them, playing the role of an old man, a housewife, a flaming homosexual, a militant feminist. Other wanna-be actors would hop up next to him and try their own best characters, but Wade got all the laughs. The others just didn't understand how to control an audience, and ultimately, when Wade decided that the act would stop, it would stop.

I'd always thought that Wade was lonely despite the glory. Every one of his friends held a different perception of him, all revering the fact that he was headed *somewhere*. He possessed no present, nowhere he could fit in before the theatres started displaying his name in flashing lights and he graced every late-night talk show and magazine cover on the planet. Perhaps the drugs served as companion (Lou Reed: "It's my life & it's my wife").

His girlfriend never cried, I heard once. Three days later she was seen around town with Josh, and, soon after, they were going steady.

The odd funeral ceremony. More people mulled about that anybody could possibly know before the age of twenty. That, I suppose, was his unique charm: if you hung around him for maybe a half hour, you'd feel as though you were close, that *he* mattered in your life.

Middle school girls on smack tossed withered roses at his coffin. Some of the actors wailed and hugged each other. A blistering sun pelted down on us and I realized that it was one of the worst days of the year to wear black.

Eventually the funeral crowd shuffled away, tears in the eyes. I wondered if I'd ever be able to smile again, or, conversely, if I'd never think twice about Wade's remarkable talents.

That autumn, I sat in the bar beside the Mark Antony, sipping a dusty brew. The only light was the balmy neon blue radiating from the beer signs behind the counter. I hunched in the back, surveying the ugly middle-aged customers. Not ugly in that they were sordidly unattractive, but they were aware of the fact that they were past their prime and they interacted awkwardly, like they all thought and wished they were ten years younger. Older greying men with walrus mustaches would whistle lasciviously at blonde women whose skin was beginning to wrinkle. Sometimes I'd think about how I'd look a lot older in the not too distant future, and women who once repulsed me would become a lot more attractive. Not the kind of swinging singles bars I'd been frequenting recently, where I'd drink silently and watch the world rejoice despite me. Here, I resented the impotent feeling, wishing somehow to lift my spirits.

I remember I'd seen Wade sing here once. God, his voice was beautiful. The show was sappy, sappy, sappy and went nowhere. He teamed up with two overweight middle-aged performers. They probably wished themselves ten years younger also. But oh, his voice.

A tear formed in my eye, I remember, when his voice faded slowly after the final drawn-out bass phrase of "A Love Song." Beautiful, sad, and contemplative, written by a woman who'd been in love with another woman who wasn't a lesbian. The tragedy of telling someone you love them when they don't reciprocate. I'd been having girlfriend troubles then (what's new?) and could empathize completely. Then I'd realized that Wade, too, felt that way—without love, despite constant adulation. I could tell from his glassy eyes, his soulful & horrible voice, his swaying body. And then the realization left my mind until this afternoon, as I consummated my relationship with this watery Coors. I almost cried again, although if someone asked me why I wouldn't have been able to tell them.

A strapping wind blew through the alley, scattering cardboard boxes and candybar wrappers. I was bundled in my winter coat, the collegiate one my parents bought me when they'd thought I was headed to Harvard and would have to survive the frigid Massachusetts winter. My ratted red Converse shuffled across the icy gravel, and I almost fell as my gloved hands gripped the red brick building. Suddenly, a familiar figure emerged from behind the dumpster, older now, unkempt, in a ragged, and bulky trenchcoat.

"Wade?" I gaped in confusion. It had been years since I'd thought of him, that afternoon in the Mark Antony. Nobody spoke of him these days. I suppose that was worse than not fitting in, worse than finding reconciliation in the fact that he'd one day be rich and famous, worse than leaving behind mountains of grief. Wade had been forgotten by his friends. Now he was nothing, not even a hushed word spoken in dark corners during the endless gelid nights.

He didn't say anything. I recognized the same melancholy eyes that had so fascinated me that night I watched him perform. Not one note of his beautiful voice warmed my ears.

As I reached for him, a sudden chill gale struck me, and again I almost toppled, pressing against the building to prevent myself from tottering over like a house of cards.

When I turned again, only the blank alley stared back at me. For days I wondered if it had really been him. And then, I forgot again.





**The Natives (dedicated to Chief Joseph)**

From  
where  
the  
Son  
now  
cowers-

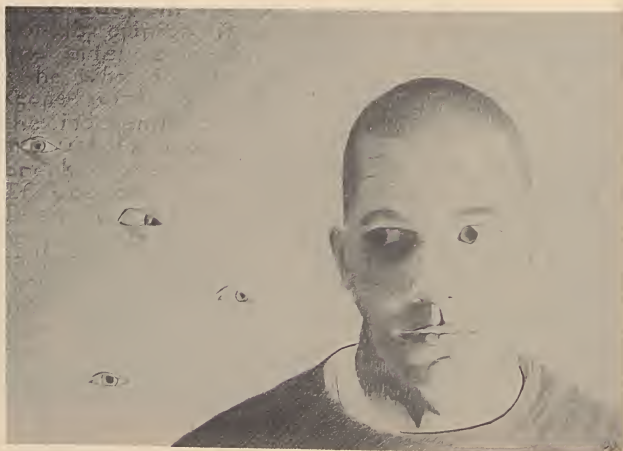
we  
shall  
fight  
forever

Ben Smith





Anne Sloan



Anderson Williams

## Untitled

Erika Viltz

I looked into the mirror. My face, my hair, my eyes, my hands. The water fell out of the faucet. It splattered. I heard it. I looked at my hands. The backs and the fronts. The veins that were blue and purple. I clenched my fists and then released. I leaned over and scooped up the hot water with my hands and threw it over my face. It dribbled to my chin and onto my plaid shirt.

"So I told her 'hey, i'm on my lunch break, if you want that old man's diaper changed you gotta do it yourself'."

"And what did she say?"

Two ladies in the background. Their voices beat my ears. I wish they'd shut up. They're so damn pure. They don't know anything. They don't know what it feels like. Where was I anyway? In the bathroom. It stinks. What did I do? Turn the water off. I turned the water off. What am I doing just standing here? They can come and get me anytime now. My mother's waiting for me outside. She thinks I'm crying. She's crying. I'm waiting for her to see the guilt in my eyes. How long will I be able to hide it? I forced the tears up and then left the bathroom.

"I know sweetie, it's alright. It's going to be alright."

My mother held me in her arms. We walked down the hospital halls with her arm around my shoulder. We sat in a blank, lonely room. The TV was up in the left corner. My hands looked back at me. I dazed at the wall in front of me in a trance.

"You're late."

"Dad I'm sorry Trisha just had to get some gas before she could drop me off."

"Well then you should of planned your time better."

"My time was fine I'm sorry if I didn't set a minute for getting gas."

"Well maybe if I make sure you don't go out for awhile you will."

"What?"

"Don't you what me."

"Why, I'm only a little late!"

"The longer you stand here sassing me the longer you'll be at home weekends."

"Oh my God I can't believe this!"

"That's 3 weekends, got any more?"

"God I hate you."

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

"Sweetie, sweetie?"

I looked at my mother. Her eyes. The formation of her eyes. I've never seen before. I'm sorry mamma. I didn't think about you. They'll interrogate you later I'm sure.

"Sweetie it's time to go in. I know this is hard for you though so if you don't want to go, I'll understand."

"I'll go."

My God. That was my voice. It was frightening. That was me speaking. It was cracky but it was my voice. I swallowed. I won't talk anymore.

We walked slowly and with our heads low. My eyes were up. They moved quickly from right to left and around and forward. We went into a room. It smelled. There was a curtain. I didn't look at my hands but they were looking at me. I might have to cut them off. Some cops came in. I stayed close to my mother. I didn't look at their eyes but I couldn't look down at my hands. I looked at the curtain.

"I don't want to argue with you so let's just drop it."

"We're not arguing because you're the child and not on my level and therefore you don't know what the hell you're talking about. I'm trying to teach you something!"

"Oh so because I'm not as old as you means that I can't have an opinion?"

"You can have an opinion when it calls for an opinion but this is fact."

"It isn't a fact. Look let's just drop it ok?"

"You need to learn some goddamn respect."

"Dad, why won't you let me drop it?"

"I don't know who the fuck you think you're talking to!"

"Stop screaming at me that's all you ever do!"

"My condolences Mrs. Thompson. I'm sorry that we have to put you through this. It'll only take a minute."

I walked through the curtain with my mother. He was on the table. Covered by a black layer. He had it coming. The black cover formed his shape. His belly was huge. It arced and then fell to his chest and his face. It was shining black.

I opened the window that I had left unlocked the night before. I slid through it. He was watching TV in the family room. He was disgusting sitting with his hand down his pants. He was supposed to be working at home today, he said. He wasn't. I don't care. As long as he stays there. He smelled of sweat and greasy turkey sausage. Did he see me? No I was quick. I snuck upstairs making sure I skipped the squeaky third step from the top. Into their room and

into his forbidden closet. To the top shelf. What did he think I couldn't reach up there? I'm not five years old you asshole. Open the box and take it out. I took it out. I saw my mixed up reflection in the silver. My hand shook. I didn't want to accidentally shoot it. At myself. I heard it. The third step made its noise. There was nowhere to go. He was in here now. I couldn't close the door, he was in here. He was coming towards the closet. Why was I scared? I had it. I had everything. He was nothing because I had everything and he was nothing. I walked out. He was startled.

"Oh God, you scared me pumpkin!"

I looked at him.

"What are you doing home, I didn't hear you come in."

I had it in my hand by my side. He looked down to it. His face dropped and then rose in anger.

"What the hell are you doing with that thing put it down!"

What are you doing you idiot don't you come over here. Stay back before I kill you. I should have said it. I should have warned him. I didn't warn him. I didn't warn him cause then maybe I couldn't do it. I couldn't hold that heavy thing up for long so I pulled it and dropped it. Quicker than he dropped. Then the red drained out. Sneaking from the sides. I felt weak. I felt like I had no legs. I caught myself. I began to walk. I didn't look at his body. I stopped. I remembered. Oh my God. I have to wipe it off. I took a towel from the pantry. I wiped the gun. My hands shook. They were so ugly. They shook as I wiped it. I shouldn't have done it. But I did it. I shouldn't have done it. Why was it worth doing? I had some reasons. But I don't remember them. Put it back in the box. I put it back in the box. I looked around. What do I do? I don't know what to do. What was I supposed to do afterwards? Put it in the closet. No wait! Take it with you. Drop it into the alley. In the ghetto. Away from all this suburbia. I reached for the rolex on his hairy wrist. Give it to me. How do you get this damn thing off. I got it. Into my pocket. I walked to the heart box on the mantle. I emptied the contents onto the bed. I picked out the treasured items, the diamonds and gold. Put them in the other pocket, no not that one. The left pocket. Now run.

They removed the cover from his face and I didn't look. My mother shrieked as if she didn't know what had happened. As if she didn't know it was him. She nodded her head. And turned to hug me. I was as tall as her. This was the first time I wished I wasn't. I could see over her shoulder and saw his face as they placed the cover back.

**metronome**

waves hiss at my feet.  
no puddle forms  
in the heel of my footprint.

click.

from the tangerine sky  
hangs a tilted ladder.

click.

like a broken metronome's  
last click  
it forgets time.

cL I c k .

Jason McEnaney



**where the doubt begins**

The lines have to be straight  
almost exactly erect  
Tension involves itself in a diversion  
meant for fun

Would the story be right without  
these details, as a jittering hand stumbles  
across the square and reality clashes  
With mind's eye invisionment

This isnt working.  
And it doesnt look like a house  
And I picked the wrong color crayon  
    Maybe if I practiced more     often  
I    could draw   good pictures   a n d  
make something   out   of  
my life

evan

**king's grill, three decades later**

too young to forget the morning at king's grill —  
rainy outside, outdated dingy tiles and vinyl coated booths,  
cold scrambled eggs pushed around the plate too long with  
a bent-tined fork  
and the tired careful way an old black man  
walks in, holding a grey-tweed cabby hat  
in his hands.  
sits on a stool by the register, waits for the hassled  
bleach-blond waitress, eyes made up and  
dulled. "can i help you? pardon? speak up sir, i can't hear you"  
impatiently so  
he sits up a bit straighter, smiles  
restrained and tolerant.  
"do you serve coloreds here." emphasizing each word  
and something changes. waitress  
winces slightly even while she laughs. "can you  
pay us? we serve anyone who can pay us two dollars for breakfast."  
and as the man settles onto the stool, takes off his raincoat,  
she heats the griddle  
and shakes her head a second, too old to  
not remember. and nothing is left to say.

Rachel Childs

### Me and the Rain

You can smell'em comin',  
don't take long-  
as you sit back propped  
and lazy like,  
they slip-  
wigglin' an gigglin'  
in the air.

And down they come  
like silly specks,  
An I just sit back  
smilin',  
As crazy chuckles jump,  
-dive-  
And with shplat,  
say howdy.

Timothy Tickle

**Watercolors: A Consummation**  
**~for Anne**

Look through the deepest circle of a vase,  
Suspend water over fire,  
Pluck petals, count days,  
Then in reflective gaze  
Discern between memory and desire.

So bulbs and petals fall free from your hair,  
So Fall's last leaves scuttle-dance 'cross stone,  
So when we closed doors from atop the stair  
So your eyes' last waning light shone.

Gather embers from the depths of your eye,  
Whisper evers never said,  
Then breathing barely  
Half a sigh, know full why  
Shed-tears water-blossom flower beds,

So water and fire weld  
Our souls in phase  
So memory and desire  
interplay  
inter lay

Two ones  
Now  
One

Beneath the bottom

We smelled  
We held

The deep  
The vase

OEH



Anderson Williams



Aaron Tanimoto



**Monologue of King Lear Standing on a Log, Contemplating His Underwear**

If a bouquet of trees were to fall  
would it even be heard at all?

A single petal is never a waste.  
Allow it to blossom, shield it from haste.  
I lost my skirt,  
it fell off my knees,  
it sounded like  
a bouquet of trees.

A petal is propelled by so many tears,  
a bucket of wax, a bucket of years.  
Throughout the ages,  
I've learnt which legs to show,  
not the bronzed but the fairest snow.

Behind them the flabbiest thighs a man's ever seen,  
before them the gaping eyes of amphibian green.  
Down, grasp, sticky the tongue,  
which strokes and croaks  
like the warm setting sun.

Standing alone, I've found my relief,  
Drop your pants, and feel no grief.

Shake McSpere

**mother**

You remember me- curled around your lap,  
head nestled in your neck and a tiny palm  
sticky with glue wrapped in your hand.  
I sang for you- about a baby bumblebee

and a school bus, while copying your smile  
onto manila paper with my greasy crayon.  
But one day I turned to look into your eyes  
and watched them spill tears across your cheek

gently like my watery blue paint it smeared your  
face, chin nose and forehead into a swirling  
mess, so I smudged your smile with the back  
of my hand and it looked like earth bled from

the center. On the refrigerator the picture hung  
and I stared at it, as minutes passed into years,  
inches and your lap gradually shrunk. I tried to  
hide behind you but I was seen, I had

seen and my hand was empty. I packed away  
the songs, the paints and crayons and let  
thoughts as full as tears spill neatly onto lines  
of paper. Now you watch me in silence, my

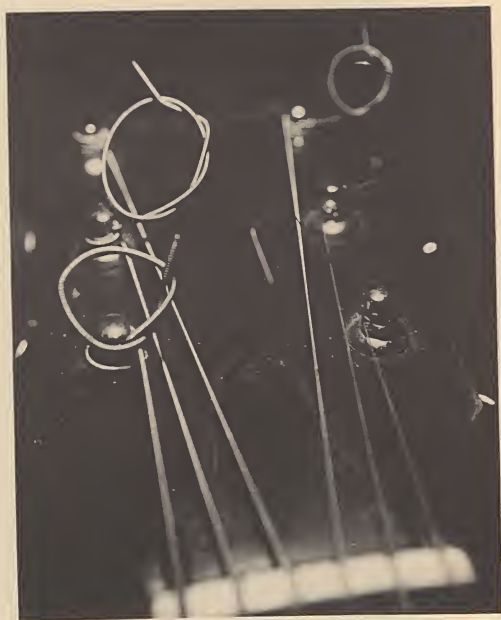
silence, with arms hanging by your side like  
waterless stems because other people look at  
me, touch me, listen to me, because

I am no longer your little girl.

Kerry Espinola



Terry Tracey



Anne Sloan

## in the grip of THE MAN

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

normally i don't smoke crack certainly not in the place of authority but today THE MAN had yelled at me and when THE MAN yells at you theres trouble because he runs the show. but he didn't yell at me in the conventional way. no, THE MAN looks at you gravely and his face turns slightly red and he speaks in low tones and there is obvious disappointment and if theres one thing youve been trained to avoid its THE MANs disapproval. so i felt like shit, so i smoked crack. who wouldnt?

i lay on the red brick central plaza and my stomach heaved and i couldnt breathe and life was a strain and i felt dirty and i was on crack and i remembered all the propaganda bullshit we had been fed through our whole lives and i reflected on myself as the Promising Young Scholar, and the only one with the ability to stop me is myself as i get into more and more trouble with THE MAN while the Administration tried to peddle me as a role model. the Administration doesnt know of my troubles with THE MAN (otherwise they would scorn me) and they dont know that i smoke crack and if they did they probably wouldnt think of me as a role model anymore. the sky shifted to a red hue and the brick ground thrust itself up at me and i grated my fingernails across the brick and the nail on my left pinky broke and the hand started to bleed and i stuck the finger in my mouth and thought of the junkies we Scholars could view on the outer plazas and how dirty they always looked and the Administration would make *them* into role models also, role models of what we Scholars shouldnt be, and i thought of how the junkies would bleed and wouldnt notice and wouldnt care and how dirty they always looked and their apathy because their crack could make up for lack of any real graces. but i was too smart to get addicted to crack, right?

i thought of myself as one of the junkies as my chest heaved and my heart beat faster and faster and i felt like i would die and the fountain sprayed at the center of the plaza and the Scholars milled about, but it was as if they didnt see me because nobody came to talk to me, and it was as if i'd become one of the junkies, who you never talk to and never come near like one of the untouchables in india who everyone fears because no scholars want to turn into junkies.

then THE MAN was out here! milling past the Scholars, who saluted as he passed by, and i saw the anger still in his eyes, just his way of making you think that *you* are the center of his anger regardless of who he is really pissed at this time, and i knew that i feared the man and i didnt know why i should be any less afraid now—i should be more scared that he would discover i was on drugs—but i was on crack and the crack is your chance to

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

do all that you would regret otherwise so i stood and i yelled out Fuck you to THE MAN and he turned and i screamed at him and called him a hypocrite and said Fuck you and your high society and said damn it im an individual and said Fucking let me alone so i can be me and said this is my life, you cant control it you bastard.

and THE MAN never yells. he just looked at me and his face turned a shade of red and i could feel the disappointment in his voice as he told me that we'd discuss this tomorrow and i could already feel my balls in his guillotine and it was all a mistake but THE MAN laughed slightly and turned around. and my Academy career was finished, i knew, and i collapsed, my stomach heaving, the sky turning a brighter hue of red. and i vowed never to smoke crack again.



## A Day's Excursion

A man steers with a curled finger  
and the thin neck of a Budweiser.  
He laughs, at wind whipping  
through the window, rattling.  
His hair blows furiously, and  
he stretches across  
four gangly kids who bounce  
on the laps of dads, moms.  
He grabs his woman's knee and squeezes.  
Everyone laughs, bumping behind  
in the truck bed and they sing,  
while the rocky pavement yields  
to beach and the jolting truck flies,  
leaving tracks deep as caverns in the wet sand.  
When the coughing engine chokes they burst  
from the heavy doors, tripping and tumbling to the water's edge.

Men and women stretch across a blanket,  
cup the tips of cigarettes in their palms,  
cursing the wind, watching, between sips  
from their cans, as the children disappear in  
the frothy waves with laughs and screams.  
They talk; men talk about coaching stories, parties,  
late nights and beer, senior year at Westfield State,  
but mothers remember their first apartments, the laundromat,  
and their swollen bellies...

so they stand quietly  
and hold towels out to the shivering children  
with seaweed clinging to their ankles.

When the pale sunlight burns into crimson and gold, shells and  
perriwinkles are snatched from hands and sand is wiped, roughly  
from feet.  
From the hurtling truck the children watch in the distance, with  
serious expressions as the names they had carved with their toes  
are swallowed by the rising tide.

They are silent, like their mothers, as the men laugh and sing.

Kerry Espinola

Wish

I caught a falling leaf  
and taped it to my wrist  
with black elastic,  
my yellow tourniquet of hope.

I let it go spinning  
into a saltless ocean rush  
cold enough to kiss for warmth,  
warmly wishing time the same.

Paul Fyfe

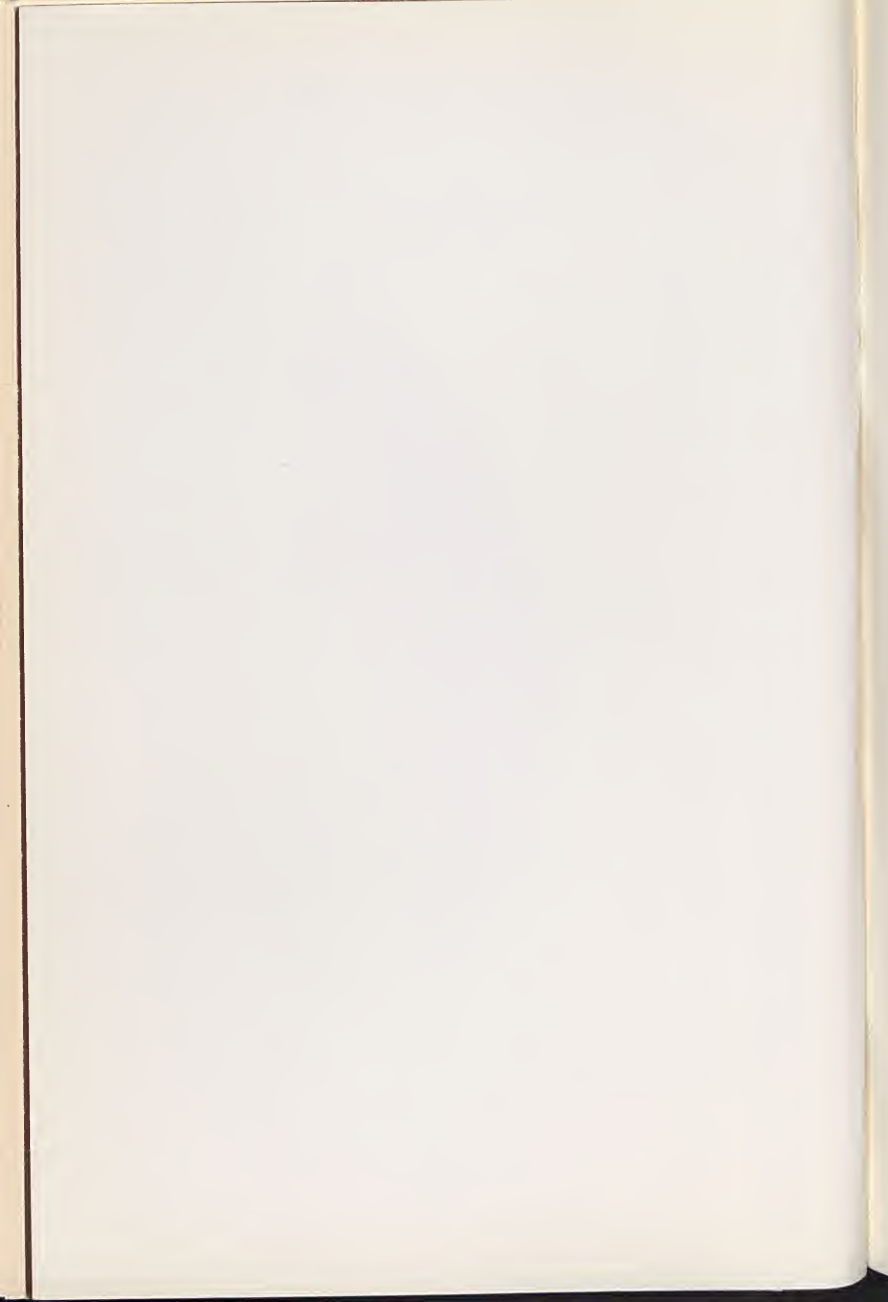


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WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY  
WINSTON-SALEM, NC  
FALL 1996

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THE HUMAN SOUL WEIGHS  
THREE TO FOUR OUNCES.

-DON DELLILO, *AMERICANA*

# THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

Spring 1997

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## Contents

### Art/Photography

Landscape .....	Karen Coachman .....	7
Untitled .....	Mary Dillard .....	8
Untitled .....	Mary Dillard .....	15
Untitled .....	Anne Sloan .....	16
Untitled .....	Cassie Howell .....	21
Untitled .....	Kim Robinson .....	22
Untitled .....	Jonathon Thomas .....	29
Untitled .....	Jason Herring .....	30
Untitled .....	Jonathon Thomas .....	35
Untitled .....	Cassie Howell .....	36
Untitled .....	Amy Bungardner .....	37
Untitled .....	Jonathon Thomas .....	38
Untitled .....	Mary Dillard .....	47
Untitled .....	Anne Sloan .....	48

### Prose

It's Just a Sweet Sweet Fantasy .....	Joseph Golden .....	9
The Vine .....	Paul Fyfe .....	24
Faye's Story .....	Heather Chappell .....	39

### Poetry

Georgia O'Keefe's birthday .....	Jason McEnaney .....	5
water and words, a poet's account ..	Ben Smith .....	6
To Do .....	Michael Janssen .....	14
standing .....	Doug Crëts .....	17
Road .....	Michael Janssen .....	18
Fish .....	Doug Crëts .....	19
It is what each of you will gaze toward at the hour of death* ....	Jason McEnaney .....	20
apology .....	Rachel Childs .....	23
Running .....	Timothy Tickle .....	28
The Night Before It Happened . . .	Ansen Lawes .....	31
Bags .....	Doug Crëts .....	32
broken basement window .....	Jason McEnaney .....	34
Grocery Store .....	Doug Crëts .....	46
Untitled .....	Anonymous .....	49
There Are Things I Thought .....	Knox Robinson .....	50
The World Withholds .....	Michael Janssen .....	52

# THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

OF THE

AMERICAN

REPUBLIC

BY

JOHN F. JOHNSON

OF THE

UNITED STATES

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THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

OF THE

AMERICAN

### Georgia O'Keefe's birthday

a magnifying glass lies on the kitchen table  
 where Georgia sits holding a spoon of Cheerios  
 up to her eye, scrutinizing the porous texture  
 of each oatly circle.

*I'll paint one of these, yes, earthtones, splendid earthtones.*

(enter husband with a dozen red roses)  
 Georgia smiles unhappily at the sheared stems.  
 (snatches the roses)

she arranges them in a vase  
 and begins to take them up, individually,  
 to look, closely. closer. closer.  
 six inches, then three, an inch from her eye  
 she screams, *velvet, blood, water, life, death, do you see all these*  
*things too, darling? Thank you, darling, thank you!*

(exit husband, immersed in thought)  
*I've married a mad genius with a botany fetish, and*  
 (trips)  
*ouch! damn cow skull.*

Jason McEnaney

**water and words, a poet's account**

near the edge, little stepping stones stepping on  
larger standing stones: mute witnesses of  
murmuring water, that unfurling, curling serpent  
which curses rocks, branches, and permanence, wondering why  
all the world doesn't curl and curse and  
move and move -  
creators of essence, non-motion and motion,  
the moment when words strike a comma and sit there, motionless:  
molecules of water before stone, clawing, gnashing,  
wrenching at last a grain of meaning, then  
bumbling along as before, exuberant and frolicsome, foaming  
white and frothing, curling and cursing and  
moving and moving

Ben Smith





Karen Coachman

THREE TO FOUR OUNCES



Mary Dillard

## It's Just a Sweet Sweet Fantasy

Joseph Golden

He woke up quickly and noticed she was still asleep. Slowly he untangled himself from around her. Glancing at the alarm clock he saw that it was five minutes past five. He tasted his tongue and caught remnants of sweat and butterscotch syrup. He held his breath and rolled out of bed slowly. She was asleep with that smile she always wore that made him feel fuzzy inside. He too was smiling. He was smiling so hard that his cheeks started to hurt. A determined tear crawled from his eye. He had seen one hundred sun rises and one hundred sunsets all reminders of the everyday beauty that his Lord put in this world, but he had not seen beauty quite the likes of that woman. He slowly shook his head in disbelief. Wow! God actually *did* make someone for everyone. "Al hamdullillah!" he creaked, "All praise is due to Allah!"

While bending beside the bed, his silent awe turned into reflection. He sighed somewhat loudly and thought about his life and how he never really grew up knowing that happiness was attainable. At least not by black folks. The people around him had nothing. They didn't much seem to care either. It seemed like they never tried to do anything to change their lot in life. Occasionally they followed a charismatic leader until he or she hit a wall and then they reverted to their claims that they always knew 'that' would happen. The people around him depressed him. He talked about goals and they talked about gold. He talked about where he wanted to go in life and they talked about where they wanted to go that weekend. That sort of thing he learned to brush off. Eventually. But those people, he recalled, lied to him. He bit his lip as he thought about the few couples who he could count on his right hand that actually liked each other and were happy together for any long amount of time. It seemed they were exceptions to the rule. Some sort of freaks of nature. After all, nobody could actually really like each other all the time. When people tried to be happy other people seemed to discourage even that. Some folks just weren't happy unless the people around them were unhappy. And if it was one thing a nigga could not stand, it was somebody who was always trying to be happy. What the fuck did they have to be happy about? They made up labels for 'them niggas'. Them niggas, the ones who actually had the nerve to try more than once to be happy. He knew he had to get away from those sorts of people, the uninspired



letters. The hilt of the sword had the word "Life" written on it in very small, almost indecipherable letters. The place where the blood turns to fire on the tattoo had the word "Hell" written very small in a wavy fashion that made it look, at first glance, like a part of the fire. His tattoos were everyday reminders of thoughts he had as a young man. He stretched out, put his hands behind his head closed his eyes and was just about to fall back to sleep when his little girl stopped that from happening.

"Daddy!" And at the same time he heard her voice, the door flew open making a knocking sound where it meets the doorstep. "OOPS! Sorry!" She then leaped into his lap, quite unexpectedly, and said "As-salam-aliekum!"

"May the peace and the blessings that only God can give be upon you also."

He knew she was up that early because she was going to watch Saturday morning cartoons all day long. He used to do the exact same thing. Nuts never fall too far from the tree he figured. He told her he was going to make mommy breakfast because she had a long week.

"Daddy, you made breakfast all this week. Mommy makes breakfast on the weekends." He nodded and sighed as they headed towards the kitchen. "I know I know. Whatever. Hey, you don't want me to cook or something? You don't think daddy can cook?" She did not respond. Instead she wiggled her feet at his side. He was her horse or car or plane or something.

"You know she's tired. Mommy won't ask but she would like it if I made breakfast today. Since you are up Ameera, you get to be my little helper. Princess gets to be daddy's helper. But only if you want to. Go ahead and watch your cartoons. Daddy will be all right without your help." He was over acting like he was hurt but not willing to show it. He sniffled, "I understand. Cartoons are very important to you. They are sooo important . . ."

"The guilt trip wont work daddy. I want to help."

"Good. I was at the end of my rope with that act. I hear you make a mean blueberry pancake." He stood straight up and stuck his nose in the air and put on his worst aristocratic British accent. "Is there any truth to the rumor? Ama . . . Amur . . . Amy . . . I'll translate it and call you Princess. Wait! You are clearly not *the* princess but I simply cannot say your bloody name." He then changed his British accent to an aggressive lawyer type. He picked her up quickly and set her down on the kitchen table. "Did you make a bloody blueberry pancake? And if AND since you DID! Was it any bloody good?"

They both laughed.

"Daddy, you are so silly! I know how to make blueberry pancakes. Can I make them for mommy?"

"Indeed," he said as he walked into the restaurant style refrigerator. Ameera followed on his footsteps. He began mumbling to himself the things he would like to have for breakfast. As he mumbled he grabbed things and blindly pushed them towards Ameera behind him. "Blueberry pancakes, hot apple cider with cinnamon sticks, we'll scratch up some biscuits, grits, omelet. I should build that chicken coop soon . . . I need eggs . . ."

"Daddy! I can't hold all this stuff! You take the eggs."

He stopped.

He looked.

Behind her he saw that she put everything he gave her on the floor. He scratched his head as he cracked up. He was actually kind of wondering as to how in the world she was holding all the stuff he was stacking up on her. "I thought you were holding that stuff . . ."

"I'm smarter than you think plus you're getting old. Jameela told me you stack stuff up on people without looking. She said you're a mess in the fridge. So I was ready."

"Am I really getting old? Anyway. I need stuff for the omelets. Three cheeses, diced chicken and turkey, diced green bell peppers and tomatoes. Wait," he said. He then changed his voice to the wicked witch of the west. Or was it the witch from Snow White? "Did you go and eat all the tomatoes?" For good measure he threw in, "My pretty."

She put her hands on her hips like her mother did and looked at him with the same, "If you asked me that again . . ." look. He cracked up at just how similar the two were. He looked, but there were no tomatoes to be found.

"Shit. Tomatoes."

"Daddy . . ."

"Sorry Ameera. Old bad habit. Come run to the greenhouse with me real quick." She still stood and he was reminded of the fact that his face was still hurting with that smile. He tried. But being blessed stopped him from being able to wipe that grin off his face. Her toes were tapping rather loudly rather quickly rather suddenly. "Have I upset you my Princess? No? Well then lets go. Mama will be up in a minute. We want to have everything ready when she gets up. You want a hop on my back again? Why can't I ride on your back sometimes, hun?" He put his hands on her shoulders and quickly spun her around and put his calf on the top of her head as he continued. "You eat well. You're in good shape. God knows we don't starve you." He took his leg down and she turned around. She was not amused.

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

"All I ask is that you give *me* a ride every now and then. Stop looking at me like that. Stop it! Okay okay, I'll give you the ride since you begged me to." He was actually impressed that she let him have enough rope to tie his own noose. He would have socialized with the likes of his daughter if he were her age. Of course a parent would think something like that. His smile still hurt. He had cool kids. They had a cool father. What more was there to ask for?

They went out back to the big greenhouse. As the door careened open, a light buzzing noise poured out into the air. That's odd he thought. Where is all my other stuff? There was only one tomato in the entire place! He almost jumped higher than a crackhead when he saw the tomato screaming that noise. "What the . . ."

Oh boy. The devil was there. But why did he come to the greenhouse? He shook his head hard to get a better grasp of things and he saw this dinky little clock where the tomato was. He shook his head violently and he realized he was in bed and that his alarm was going off. He was ten minutes late for an exam and he had to be at work in fifty minutes. He sighed.

As usual he woke up alone, in his under furnished apartment, clutching his pillow. His big empty bedroom made a suggestion that he go back to sleep. But today he didn't listen. He wore a frown that was just the opposite of the smile he had in the dream. He didn't even know he was wearing it. He sauntered to the bathroom and turned on the shower. Damn that was a cool dream. Damn he liked that shit a lot. His eyes smiled quickly but the frown chased the gleam in his eyes away like it always did. He thought about that dream and yawned. "That shit would be boring," is the lie he told himself. "No it wouldn't," he contradicted himself. "I don't want to be Bill Cosby. Fuck that. That nigga is boring."

The shower was hot and wet. He mumbled the words "hot" and "wet" to himself as he eased in the shower. Then he burst out laughing. He almost fell. "Hot and wet." He laughed and nodded his head in a slow 'no' motion. "Hot and wet. What the fuck did I expect from a shower?"

The laugh would die out once he started thinking about what he expected. Wow. What did he expect? "I wanted us to be the next Cosbys . . ." He mumbled. He never ceased to amaze himself with just how honest he could be when he verbalized his thoughts. He would attempt to check his ego before it was the conductor on his train of thought. "Not that I'm the best or any shit like that, but I bring my share of shit to the table. I expect to not have to bring what I want out



of somebody. Damn! Why was I so damn stupid? What the fuck?" He looked at his penis. "Were you thinking for me? Hun?" His penis did not respond. He would have passed out if it did. He had a hot flash of some good old fashioned gangster shit. His violence, however, was aimed at no one in particular. Certainly he would not hurt her. He sure as hell wouldn't hurt himself.

"Why? Why? Why? Why?" He sat down in the tub. The water from the shower actually felt better falling from a higher height he noticed for a moment. Sitting on the floor in the shower just felt way too weird for him so he stood up again.

After the shower he stumbled into the kitchen and tasted his tongue. Remnants of morning breath. He wanted an omelet so he opened up his empty little fridge and stood silent for a second. He scratched himself and yawned again. "That dream was getting pretty good," he chuckled to no one in particular. There were a few eggs and a pitcher of water. There also was a single slice of cheese and a leftover turkey sandwich. He stood still, closed his eyes and smiled.

"Shit. Tomatoes."

**To Do**

I went to that old house to go crazy  
though I did not know it then.

I should have known. I saw  
the towels soaking up the floor,

the curious bricks discomfoting  
a hemmed-in sky. I thought

the vibrant whirr of stars could be  
a lotion for the withered limb,

a salve to heal the dreaming wound.  
The house and all its walls were open,

though I did not know it, then.  
The dream of waking was, in its own way, sleep.

Then the wind, the skies stopped shaking.  
I lulled myself to living once again.

Michael Janssen



Mary Dillard



Anne Sloan

**standing**

To touch earth I must remember  
following my dad's car

through the dust.  
It was honking terribly

past the cows sweating  
in the dry Nebraska heat.

I let the car leave me  
standing in the sage and milkweed

that tattooed my legs and  
waist with the wind's slow breathing.

I watched all the cows  
stop their chewing

and move away, until  
it was me there

alone and seeing the brown  
rolled river bleeding past

its banks. I stood silent  
one pulse in the dusty morning.

Doug Crets

**Road**

If only I could have been religious  
so I could have something to get away from,  
to shed and leave behind me like a skin.  
But I was not born into a space so unfamiliar  
that I had to fling my arms about until I  
found a match and a book to keep burning,  
a fringe of dull light eating up the words . . .

Instead I found a meaning on a long road  
and forgot it - the shoulders were so tempting  
with their clutter of letters, language,  
scraps of tin and bits of bottles, a trail  
much smaller than but still not dwarfed by  
the rich dark streak of gravel leading somewhere,  
a smear of cloud and always-thickening trees.

Michael Janssen



### Fish

There is the huge fish that  
cuts the green water.

I slowly talk  
while it pirns and rolls  
through the rocks.

It cannot hear me. It may  
hear me.

My hands cut into the icy eddies  
and will the fish  
to come, sleep in my hands.

It regards me with  
a patient, drooly eye. I am all palms

openly waiting, but it gulps  
and chuffs the water, spinning  
away

in a slow, mournful seizure.

Doug Crets



*It is what each of you will gaze toward at the hour of death\**  
(20<sup>th</sup> century AD)

your wife's face on a pillow next to you  
the bottom of your kitchen table  
the phone                      on the hook  
a lawnmower bag or an ant hill  
your dog's tongue licking your face  
the ceiling of an ambulance  
a doctor's bloodshot eyes  
a green surgical mask

\*Muhammed, in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD

Jason McEnaney



Cassie Howell



Kim Robinson

**apology**

. was its name. for a moment  
i smiled at the irony of a racehorse excusing its  
failure beforehand. but as it sleekly arched at the gate  
the only choice was to accept it  
dignified as willing and blind as its title  
and as i watched the horse i wagered upon stride painfully into fifth  
place  
one of my hands held the other  
pretending it was yours.

Rachel Childs

The Vine

Paul Fyfe

I never though that coffee could be greasy, but everything finds a place here. It is not the kind of bar in which you would ask to be met, even though I first met most of my so-called friends here. I guess I wouldn't ask them back. I don't. But they are usually around, and that is fine with me. I have my coffee.

Just run into the same people in one place over and over, and you will somehow get these friends; general acquaintances who know nothing about you, nor you them, but with the intimacy of not having to reintroduce yourself every time you get together. Christ, I rarely even respond if they say anything at all to me. They don't mind so much. Sometimes they keep talking and sometimes they leave. I stare at tiny bubbles of immiscible brown floating on the surface of the dull coffee on the table and take a sip. Gone cold. Damn, have to ask that ornery bastard for another pot.

There aren't many people here at this time of day; maybe that explains why I come so often. That is ridiculous - this is no solace. I frown at the grime of the table. I raise a reluctant finger at the man walking by, happening to make eye contact. "Could I get . . ."

"Another fucking pot?"

"Yeah."

I'm a slow drinker and he stomps off. I've been here awhile and gone through a couple, requiring a fresh pot after the second cup. Go fuck yourself. He probably will and deposit the reward in my coffee. Shit. It just means I'll be pouring it on the floor next to the booth. The whole damn pot. I've had enough today anyway. I don't consider it as anything other than coffee. I still haven't used the machine she left in my apartment. I tried a couple of times while she was still in bed, I suppose in some flailing attempt at a hackneyed romantic gesture, but the only time it didn't end up too weak and looking like dark urine I managed to put in a few spoonfuls of salt. It was her fault for keeping it in a cellophane bag. She thought I did it on purpose.

Actually this shit isn't much better. I have three cigarettes left. There are five in the ashtray. Might as well. That jerk is going to take his sweet-ass time. It is never so harsh as when you light it. I don't want that first drag, or the last one for that matter. I never liked the insolence of finished cigarettes. When they're done, you want them out. If they can't find your lungs, they always find your eyes. Mine are watering.

I've never seen the guy who just walked in. I probably wouldn't have ever noticed had it not been for the shotgun. Great.

The place has horrible service. He's going to get pissed. Try to make a decent robbery and there is not even a damn employee to find. I am the only one in there.

"What the fuck are you looking at?" he asks.

"Nothing." I think it is funny that this time I mean it. It's rare you have an honest conversation here. He looks around, probably a little frustrated.

"Where the fuck are they?"

"Try ringing the bell." He turns and stares. I have been watching him. I feel like I should be afraid, and feel sort of sick that I'm not.

"Who the fuck do you think *you* are, donkey-fuck?"

"I'm waiting on coffee."

"Then shut the fuck up and wait!"

I pick up the dim cup, turn it around a few times and look out the window. There was no one around to see anything. Even if there was, the people that came by don't really care, unless you're in their way. I figure no one would ever bother call the cops for a place like this. Hell, if there was a phone under the table and the guy was in the back I wouldn't bother either.

I am starting to sweat under my trench coat. It's always too hot or too cold here. The coffee always suffers too. I look back. The man hasn't gone anywhere. He's in no big rush. No one around here is, although they'd have you thinking with all the bullshit they give you. Yeah, they had shit to do like I had. Sometimes they did. So did I, sometimes. But it usually never got done for anyone.

I don't feel any pity. Especially not for that prick waiter who might take the butt of a twelve-gauge to the ribs. Not for me. I don't particularly deserve it. Waste of time anyway. I had coffee to drink. Christ.

The man is looking around and he hears something in the back. The faggot waiter drifts through the door frowning. He doesn't see the gun. He never notices you. Too bad for him I guess.

"Hey fuckface! Where do you think you're going?"

The skinny waiter's face suddenly sinks. He almost drops the half-pot of coffee he is carrying.

"Open that fucking register and clean it out! Now! Before I blow your fucking head off."

He's fucked. I can tell. His pasty complexion has gone from sick and pimply to pallid. A few broken ribs. He can't find the right key.



They're shaking more than he is. He gets a cross check to the face with the gunstock. I was wrong.

"What the hell are you trying to do? Dick me around or something, you little piece of dead-shit?"

The waiter is struggling to get to his feet. "No sir. I've got it." His voice is as pale as his face. There is a cut over his left eye. He tries to wipe it away with his sleeve, but he can't see. He gets hit again and falls.

"Jesus Christ! Open the goddamn register and give me the money!"

The waiter gives a sick cry from the floor where I can't see him.

"Get up! Get up! If you don't get the fuck up I'm gonna . . ." He pauses and I wonder. Not here. People have been shot before, but it's just a big mess. "If you want something fucking done right, I swear . . ." He walks behind the counter looking down. He probably kicks the waiter; I see him lunge and hear another cry. He goes to the register and smashes down on it with the shotgun stock. It opens with a mangled ring. He laughs. The coffee is making me sick.

"Hey buddy, how much did you pay for that coffee?"

Damn it. With or without a gun, they just can't leave you alone. This jackass will be in here next week thinking we're the best of friends. The waiter is backing upright against the wall. He is bloody on the left side of his face, smeared with tears. I can hear him having trouble breathing and he's got a broken nose. "Sixty-five cents."

He reaches into the tray and moves some change around. He holds his hands to his face looking into it. Needs glasses probably. "Sixty-five fucking cents, now give me a cup of coffee!" He throws the money at the waiter. The waiter is silent. The man laughs.

If he was pale before, he is a corpse now, and I know that he did it. His mouth is hanging down in a pink drool. The noise of his breath has stopped. That stupid bastard.

"I said, give me a fucking cup!" He makes a quick step to the waiter who immediately winces, crying in his flinching retreat. He doesn't need to hit him again. I can hardly believe the truth in the approaching moment. It was just a lunge. He laughs again and looks at me. "You need a refill pal?"

"I'm fine." The waiter looks at me. He is over there and I am in this booth. That guy isn't going to touch me. He looks scared, scared as shit. I've never really helped anybody, and this wasn't the place to be a hero. There was never a good time and it's someone else's problem. I wonder if he'll be able to taste the spunk.

The waiter moves to the counter, still looking at me. There are a



few mugs on the bar. He takes one slowly and the other man is counting the few bills which were in the register. He knows that I know. I guess it always happens this way. Everyone is guilty and no one has the space to pardon. Another man's crimes lie on his face like clear powder. I have my own to worry about. Everyone knows and that is the reason they come here. That is why they think they're your goddamn friends.

He pours the coffee into the cup and stands still. The man sees that he is finished and pushes him out of the way. The money is strewn about the table. There can't be more than fifty bucks. His gun is in his left hand near the register. "I think that guy needs a refund on his coffee, don't you, fuckface?"

The waiter stares back at him with an unchanging blank terror. I can see a few teeth missing from his mouth. He doesn't respond.

"No. I'm fine."

"Well, get the fuck out of my face, dead-shit." The waiter shrinks back like he's on rails. He's going to drink it. I put down my cup. It's time to leave and it's not the first time that I won't leave a tip.

**Running**

As fast as your mind stands still you run  
run fast and don't look  
look back for nothing.

And pray  
pray hard for the day that maybe you will be heard  
heard in the screaming of a tense electric violin  
violin at your chin you play some stuttered off-beat, hope to God  
you're right.

Don't take time, you might be wrong  
wrong ways go both ways and go, go, go  
go on your knees and beg  
beg for the toothless whore, who's painted grin gives some relief.

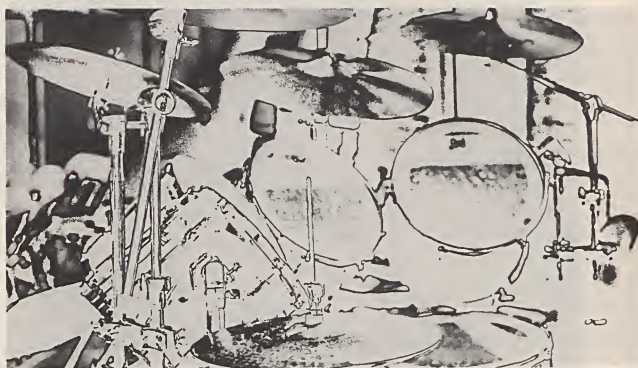
Scream, cry, throw fits of glory  
glory in the moment and nothing more  
more to death than the physical properties of the bullet, piercing your  
chest.

Timothy Tickle



Jonathon Thomas

THREE TO FOUR OUNCES



Jason Herring

### The Night Before It Happened . . .

I sat around, relaxed my mind,  
wrote a few lines,  
passed some time,  
my soul felt hard & cold  
it trembled when I remembered all the days of old.

I fiddled with my dagger,  
honed its edges with stones  
reminisced on all the stages, lights, and microphones  
I heard the firestick

**CHIK - POOWM!!!**

They bustin' in the park  
devils was ghost like Tony Starks or else torn apart

I looked at my inside to see the fire rise in me  
I envisioned marks of Cain on the brains of the ivory,  
throwing great white hopes in choke holds, and demi-gods  
dueling devils 'til blood stained their soul, because for  
years I watched my elders play your game,  
when they saw the finish line, the rules were changed.

I think it's retribution owed to me and my clan,  
the contracts called for mules and 40 acres of land but  
we'll be takin' factories and cash in large numbers-  
you hear the rumble . . . that's revolution waking from its slumber.  
The streets'll fill with creeps in Jeeps trimmed in  
chrome, rebels'll chase devils back inside they homes.  
We'll wage war for years with laser guided spears and  
those that die tryin' will be honored with tears, the  
rest'll wear vests and fight for all we want as we  
toast the revolution and spark a thousand blunts

Ansen Lawes

**Bags**

We had better tell the story  
of how those bags came to be  
in our hands that late night

and since I am  
the only one here  
I had better do the talking.

I noticed men with bags would come  
quietly to the back  
room of Millicent's Grocery

a head would  
poke into the sodium lights  
of the parking lot

and this hand would  
usher in the knockers with  
spring-loaded fingers.

I told them over stout  
and the buddies all agreed we would  
find those bags, and what they mean.

I hopped the fence  
behind the store  
being the go-between.

It was shaky. I didn't know  
where I was to be sure. Hair caked  
with Dep, shoulders hunched, I knocked.

The man said he  
would let me in, if  
I gave him a spin in my car

It was a 1962 Stingray.  
He didn't know  
so I didn't bother to let on.



I put the bags in my  
stolen car (so what?) and drove  
to the rendezvous.

My cronies looked like they forgot  
I had gone. It seemed  
someone had told them once

to meet at Sargasso Park  
bring papers. They shrugged  
as I pulled to a stop.

They huddled around the trunk, dragging  
on their hand-rolls. When I  
opened it they bent double to see.

"We have to bury them. Deeply."  
Someone coughed and giggled,  
another someone shifted the sand

under his sneakers. I can't  
say what those bags contain,  
they were light. They were worth stealing.

So we speak Russian at the creek  
just above the floodline, telling  
our stories after digging.

What sounds like an otter swims  
in the black cold water  
under a sky stained by the moon.

Doug Crets



**broken basement window**

it hung on two rusty screws,  
a rotten

tooth.

rickety, stained  
grandfatherly  
content and spat thick  
black garden run-off saliva  
into my yellow bucket  
of plastic beach shovels.

Jason McEnaney



Jonathon Thomas



Cassie Howell



Amy Bumgardner



Jonathon Thomas



## Faye's Story

Heather Chappell

Today she was going fishing.

That morning the room smelled of the over-worked coils of her heater. Faye awoke well before light, letting her eyes adjust to the dark and focusing on the swatches of nicotine-stains in the ceiling above her bed. On a different morning insomnia would have led her to the paper, working the Jumble until it was early enough to fix breakfast for Lela. Lela lived next-door for twenty-six years, and had taken sick for the last three. Warmed pear preserves, flatbread, and grits were her favorite, brought to her door at 7:30 every morning. But Lela had gone to live with her daughter now, in Cincinnati; her daughter couldn't cook flatbread. She could hire a nurse, however, to push pills in Lela's mouth while she watched her daytime TV: "Loving" and "The Young and the Restless." The nurse couldn't cook flatbread, either.

So instead of the Jumble, Faye lay in bed, listened to the heater, and waited until the light rimmed over the window sill through her linen curtains. Then she got out of bed, pulled on slippers and a robe, and shuffled over to the chest of drawers. Catching her image in the wall-mirror, she noticed the dim light and her white walls made her face look stark; black eyes that had drained to brown, and hair that was not grey, but colorless. Her skin had virtually no creases — no smile-lines, no crow's feet, only a few crinkles above her upper lip from before she'd quit smoking. It was a blank face, pale from not leaving her house for thirty-two years, save her monthly trips to Bi-Lo.

*And today I'm going fishing*, Faye thought. She pulled out her work clothes: a pair of khaki elastic-waist pants and a plain, white shirt that before today had only seen Mop & Glo in the foyer or breaking up dirt in the patio garden. But today she was leaving the house; soon Nina would be knocking on the door and they would be going fishing. *Fishing*. Out of city limits, too, into Catawba County, with wild birds and snakes hiding in tall grass, mosquitoes and ticks. She layered on the OFF! before getting dressed, dreading waiting in the foyer.

*Fishing*, she thought. *And it's so dirty outside*. She had a few minutes before Nina would be here, so she soaped up a handrag to put in a plastic baggy. *Would this do?* She dampened another washrag, for rinsing, and felt better. Sitting against the lid of the commode, she tried to bat back the nerves shining on her insides.

Her nerves first kicked in during one trip to Bi-Lo, a few years after Matthew moved to Vicksburg. When the boy was living at home



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

she had to go every week, but after he left, trips weren't a necessity. Matthew was her strong son, always moving around, and he never stopped eating. "That boy'd eat all the pig but the oink!" Lela loved to say when she ate with them every Thursday, jaunting a hearty laugh each time. Faye waited a month after Matthew married before going back to buy groceries.

She had needed toilet paper, and she'd wanted some corned beef for her hash. Everything was fine until she turned the corner of Sixth Street; the sight of the packed parking lot lit up her nerves in sprigs of hot buckling her stomach. A car horn bleated on her tail, and she found a parking spot against the back curb. Silly, really, the whole thing was. But her hands were trembling still when she unjammed a buggy from the jumbled metal frames, and she pushed the cart away feeling drained. Ahead of her, a mother was trying to soothe her tired toddler by feeding him a half-chewed cookie. A front wheel of the mother's cart was rusted, flicking in no direction, and squealing along with the baby's cookie-covered mouth.

That night she had to borrow a roll of toilet paper from Lela.

"Faye!" Nina called from the foyer, and Faye jumped. "You ready? Or are ya in bed?"

Faye wished she could stay in bed all day, do the Jumble, listen to Linda Ronstandt. If she were just silent, maybe Nina would go away, then the jitters would stop pawing at her throat and she could relax.

"Faye!"

Faye thought for a minute, about cooking her ownself breakfast for once, biscuits instead of flatbread.

"Faye?"

"I'm comin'," she said, and she pulled herself up from the toilet lid.

It was a goat. A dirty, matted-hair goat. He was standing in the brush, watching them fish, peering at them through squinty eyes. He was far enough from the lake, and far enough from them, but Faye couldn't keep her eyes on the bobber.

"What we gon' do if he comes over here?" she asked.

"Then we move," Nina said. "You best to watch your bobber. You ain't gonna catch nothing like that."

"He's not even tied up or nothin'."

"Just watch your line and hesh up." Nina looked up at the goat. "I used to keep goats like that. My granddaddy kep' 'em. When I stayed with him out in Guin, I went to school to learn how to keep 'em,

burn the horns off and such like that."

"That right?" Faye said, without much surprise. She'd gone to church with Nina for years, and since she'd known her Nina had been a landscaper, a mechanic at the Texaco, and a lampshade craftsman. She found employment as a Voodoo palm reader before she found the Lord, just trying to keep her little girl fed after her husband left.

"Mmhmm. And lernt how to take off they hormone in the middle of they head. That hormone's what make them smell's bad. Only, oncet you take off the hormone, they still stank, cause they pee all over the place. They jest don' smell so bad."

"Goats are just plain filthy, if you ask me."

"I didn't rightly take to it, myself. It's men-work, for certain. They tell ya, don't get around them goats when you're on the period. They can smell it. And when it's time for the goat, the goat can't tell if it's a female goat or a person."

"You mean, the goat'd just . . ." Faye's eyes widened.

"Yep. That's what they say, anyway. Ain't had one bother me ever, but all the same I wouldn't put it past 'em. Sometime, when they in the mood, they pee in they own mouth. Lord Jesus, it's nasty! And when they pee on people — this I seen 'em do — they rear up on they hind legs and jest spray."

Faye looked around, but the goat was gone. Nina was reeling in her line; the breeze had drifted the bobber too close to shore. She whipped the pole back over her shoulder, casting it out into deeper waters.

Years ago, Faye remembered, Matthew would go fishing. Lela always said that it wasn't talent that brought the boy the stringer filled with fish every Saturday; he was just hungry. The more he caught, the more he could eat, so they always had a freezer full of crappie. They would go every weekend, a father-son trip, before Earl died.

Earl wasn't as nearly adept with the outdoors as his son, but he loved to fish. They'd get ready to take out the boat while Faye cooked an early breakfast, Earl sitting cross-legged in the hallway picking through his tackle box. "I think," he'd sniff the air, "that today is a crank bait day." Earl only fished for bass because he liked to play with the lures. He had the Slug-O, Snagless Sally, the Shadrap, and Little George. His two favorites he kept hanging from his baseball cap; the Rooster Tail because it had a bright pink feather, and the Hula Popper, because it had a plastic grass skirt. His fancy lures didn't help his skill, though, and it was rare that he caught a fish. Once he caught an alligator gar, which Earl swore was a fish but Faye thought had a snout like a sea monster. He stuffed it and kept it on the wall of the

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

basement. Later, when the boys took up with night fishing, Earl had another catch. "Never heard a fish that could squall before," he said, "but I knew that the end of my line was hollerin'." Earl reeled in an owl. He kept it in the basement next to the gar.

Sometimes she still went into the basement. His letters were lined up in an old chest of drawers, wrapped in twine next to her marriage Bible and a pack of Salems. It was Matthew's old dresser, one she had painted white with lime knobs. She sat and read and milked smoke from the filter. The air hung sticky from hot water heater; she really should pack the letters up, keep them in the closet, keep them dry and cool. But she never did, just huddled next to the pressed wood dresser in a cloud of gospel wandering from her old cassette player; Mahalia Jackson singing against the catty talk of ivy that rimmed the basement window.

"Raspberry," the letters began, because that was her name. It had started when they were in the bank, when Earl was taken with the curtains. "What color would you call that exactly?" Faye had thought for a minute, and then said, "Rasberr-ay." He repeated it all evening, like he'd never heard the word before: "Rasberr-ay. My, this tomato aspic sure is rasberr-ay. Rasberr-ay." That night, after they'd put Matthew to bed, he made up a tune about rasberr-ay. He made her Shang-gri-la up and down the hall while he mumbling verses until they collapsed. They slumped atop the loveseat in the den, listening to the rustle of squirrels in the chimney. Her cheeks were flushed, and the last thing he said was, "Pink cheeks. Almost Rasberr-ay." And they fell asleep.

She always hesitated at the last letter, postmarked from Baltimore. He was staying at Johns Hopkins. The script on the envelope is slanted but precise, and the edge of the envelope splintered the twine.

*Raspberry,*

*The treatment is not going as well as planned here. Everything will be fine, but I tell you some things just in case. If this tumor does get the best of me, Jonathan will take care of the financial matters. And be sure Matthew is drinking his milk! Fishermen need to stay fit.*

*As far as you, my love, don't let this weigh on your heart. Soon enough we will be together again to Shang-gri-la until we collapse. Remember to rest, and keep me in your thoughts and dreams. I'll be with you always.*

*Love,  
Earl*



After the last letter, she closed the drawer and climbed the stairs to her bedroom. Sitting in front of her plastic organ, she sang into the night, her voice lilting into the miasma of insomnia lingering over her bed.

The lake was decaffeinated blue, licking limp at the water's edge. Weeds splayed in the damp area near the lip of the water, anemic from the heart of the summer. Alabama summers were always too hot, and the greenery was withered against the early cool. She was right; she didn't like this. Watching neon drift in the flat, sick water, and what would she do if it bobbed? Jagged skinned, lemon-bellied Brim, or one of those God awful monster-snout trout.

She'd gotten pretty good at the Rebus, in fact. Lela gave her several before she left, pictograph books that translated into little phrases if you guessed right. And she'd ordered a Bob Ross kit off the TV — paintings where even the rocks looked right, nestled in water that was not limp, but frothy. She could do that. Or even give the basement a good cleaning. Dust off the gar and the owl, put a rug down, maybe put a new coat of paint on Matthew's dresser. She could.

"Faye," Nina said.

"Hmm?"

"Jest seem like you were in your own little world."

"I was just thinking," Faye said.

"You remember when me and Earl went fishing together that once?"

"Yeah."

"Well, we were out in the boat," Nina started. "I never tol' you this story, cause I thought it might make you nervous. Anyways, he fell in."

"Fell in? You mean, the water?"

"Uh-huh. Right in. I was standing up in the front, and Earl had just stood up to get a Co-cola out the cooler. Anyways, I hear this 'plink' jest like somebody dropped a Co-cola in the water. Earl was jest built so small. It was the funniest thing; I turned round, there was the Co-cola, there was Matthew, not sayin' nothin', and Earl was jest gone. I stay quiet jest a second, and here come Earl — rising up from the water with his pole above his head. Ain't never figured out how he done that. Jest rise out the water lookin' like Rambo."

"Like Rambo?" Huh. Earl." Faye pictured his dripping head surfacing. "Good thing he wasn't wearing his hat."

"That thing with the pink feather? Yeah, good thing." Nina

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

surfacing. "Good thing he wasn't wearing his hat."

"That thing with the pink feather? Yeah, good thing." Nina laughed, but Faye just sat still, with a tense smile on her face.

"All of that talk about Coca-Cola, now my bladder's aching," Faye said.

"Jest go tinkle in the woods. No big thing. If'n you prop yourself up on a tree, it ain't so bad. Besides being," she held up the baggy with her soapy washrag, "you prepared."

Faye hesitated. "That's right. Prepared," she said and grabbed her toilet tissue baggy.

The tree she picked was a Catawba, young and smooth-barked. Growing up she had Catawba trees in her front yard, but "spittin' worm trees" is what everybody called them. If it had been the season, the tree would have been dotted with ripe green worms. When the time was right her brothers would scurry up the branches, filling bags with their newfound bait. She stayed away from them, pressed herself against the side of the house between the rabbit grass and clover and their garden spigot. The worms spit green when you picked them up, and the boys would pad over to the back porch with splotches of green on their shirts. It had made her nauseous, little fat worms spitting sick from their innards, but her brothers had loved it. Trampling out to fish in the early morning hours on the weekends, bags of frozen spitting worms clutched in their fingers. The worms stayed alive — keep them in the freezer, and when they thawed they lived again, wriggling into the mouth of a tantalized fish. She hated having to go to the back porch freezer, knowing what was frozen in the stacks in the corner, hated the idea of trodding off into the brambles. And after Earl died, the outside paralyzed her even more.

But here she was, propped in the middle of tangled brush. Sunlight dripped through the cover of the trees, stippled across her knees. Twigs fanned against her ankles, and the morning ballooned around her — rustling, croaking, pine needles fringing the breeze. She could see Earl here, tackle box in hand, Matthew with fistfuls of plastic worms. Drinking the fishy air and Mello-Yellow, dipping their toes along the edge of the water — Earl had loved this. Maybe it wasn't as bad as she thought. She shimmied the elastic waistband over her hips and freed her bladder. The tree rested firm against her back and she began to feel comfort, breathing the scent of earth and urine.

She smelled the goat before she saw it. He was lolling along, a slow advance to where she was. But she couldn't stop her bladder. And

she couldn't get her clothes dirty. And her legs were frozen, locked her propped against the tree. His eyes weren't on her but he kept getting nearer, creeping along the palette of leaves against the ground.

Then he was there — right there. Feet away. And she wanted to run, but she couldn't, panties tangled in the waist of her jeans. Bound at the knees. He braced himself on his hind legs. Pink. His underside was pink, peering through clusters of knotted hair.

And she could see his thing. His *thing*. Limp cylinder of grey flesh, streaming pee along a tree root. Dear God, what should she do? She shouldn't even be here, right, and this goat was going to attack her

*When they in the mood, the goat cain't tell if it's a female goat or a person.*

Dirty animal, reared up, poised — how long could this thing pee? She grabbed the back of the tree, clinging to a blemish in the bark straightening her feet to get ready to run. Away. She had to get away from this, she didn't belong here, outside is not safe. She fiddled up her panties an inch, elastic creased her thigh, and she tried to think. Tears welled in her eyes, her shoulders becoming a snarl of nerves.

The rock hit the goat on the side of its belly. Faye was shocked that she'd thrown it and she jolted as the goat lowered its front legs. "Go away, goat," she said. Her voice fluttered, but the goat didn't look at her. "Go away, goat." The goat turned and walked off.

Relief sunk into her, and her knees fell together. The rock was sitting next to the soggy ground where the goat had been — *she* had thrown it. The nervous strap around her lungs unbuckled, and there was nothing shaky to bat down inside of her. "Go away, goat," she mumbled again, dropped her plastic washrag baggy, and pulled up her clothes.

"You say you jest peed with a goat?" Nina asked.

"Yep," Faye said.

"Earl'd be proud," Nina laughed. "He always said he only fished with me cause I had a way with goats."

"That's what I've got? A way with goats?"

"Go up yonder and pee with a goat? You must got somethin'."

"Yeah, I must've gotten something."

"I tell you, brave is what you got. I'dve jest run."

*Brave*, Faye thought, and she let herself fall back on her elbows. Dirt pushed into the creases of her arms, leaves pawed at the ends of her hair, and the sunlight hit right at her eyes.

"Lordy, Faye. Peeing with a goat."

And Faye laughed.



**Grocery Store**

I learned this  
from a woman  
who shops every  
two weeks

who drools snuff  
down her nerveless  
lower lip, staining  
her natty grey coat.

Entropy bothers most  
everything and every-  
body. But it is of  
no large importance

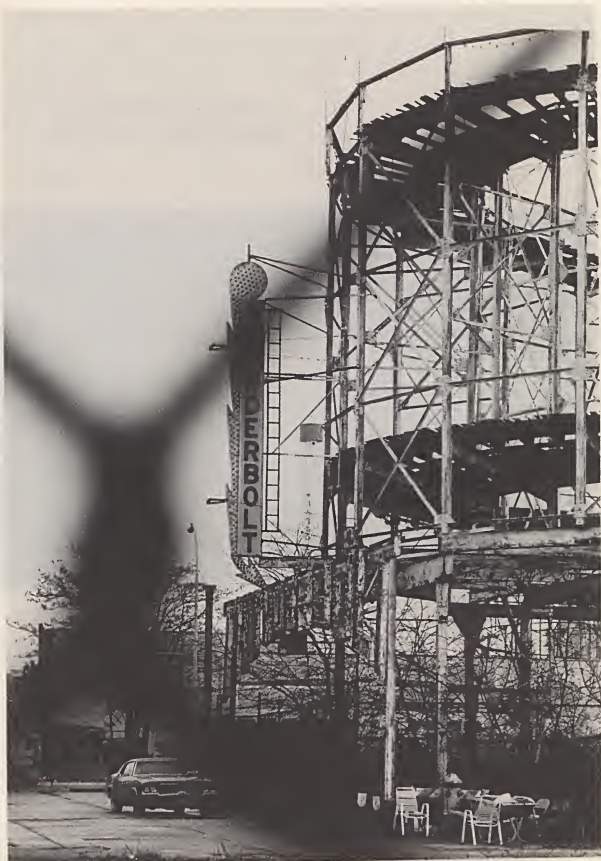
for with what the life  
leaves by soft threads  
there is much  
to pick out and hold on to.

You may slump  
and fidget at the wrong times  
or trip from your fingers  
the small change for cigarettes

and people may sigh or  
with pity steal a public glance  
but as long as your mind  
remains, you are here.

If she doesn't come in  
next month it will mean  
"All is done", and "I'm fine. I  
was in the clear".

Doug Crets



Mary Dillard

THREE TO FOUR OUNCES



Anne Sloan

## I

You have three names,  
And it is just that simple.

## II

You wanted to put three roses in one box  
(I thought, as a symbol  
of something in the midst of nothing)  
But you gave them to three beautiful girls  
    an instant too soon  
    one night  
    in my room

## III

I too can be three on occasion,  
cold Kali ma looking for her due,  
her just desserts, a slice of revenge pie.

But near you, I am Eve to match your Adam,  
standing under your tree, where yet another you  
slides down and offers me a bite to eat.  
(The third you, a name like no other, is  
what you've decided to present daily,  
your fabric, your mettle.)

I want to tell the world your name  
Tell it what you're made of  
A little secret like rainwater.

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

#### There are Things I Thought

for Wole Soyinka and Edwin Morgan

there are things i thought i would remember:

the poet's stature and grace, a king from the time before  
they took our kings away. the kind of blackness  
spoken of only in whispered tones;

or his voice, as rich and deep as my questions  
about his Africa. i got lost in his words  
like the dream you only remember half of.

i thought i would remember:

wanting to put my arms  
around the woman next to me;  
or hold her hand, because  
the poetry of revolution  
can make you want to be in love.

it remains to be seen what i will remember,  
but there are things i will not forget:

the poet's old song for a colleague;  
a colleague murdered, dead.

it was a poem he would likely  
not be able to finish reading, he said,  
and so had asked another to step in  
at his signal.

without quiver in his voice  
—that seamless voice of Africa—  
the hand motioned

*come. come here,*

*i need you.*

and the white man took the standard up  
and sent the words on in his own voice  
—the lilting, rhythmic voice of Scotland.

he set them flying  
 across heath, sounding lochs,  
 shattering bens, crags, reaching every island  
 of the Hebrides;

down to Africa, where the words whistled  
 through every prison in Nigeria  
 where the chains are red and nobody knows anymore  
 if they are red from old rust or new blood;

and elsewhere, everywhere  
 the smell of fear is buried  
 in the ditch with its corpse.

i will remember  
 wanting to cross the auditorium  
 and put my arms around Keith;  
 embrace him for every white man  
 i'd ever mistrusted  
     with good reason  
 and would continue to mistrust  
     with good reason.

i will remember what i said to Bea  
 when she asked me afterwards,  
     "what do you want to do?"

i could only reply,  
     "i want to cry for a long, long time,  
     then die."

Knox Robinson



The World Withholds

When I come across  
a fresh-marked paper  
in the street, I know

that even all our spaces  
tamed to dull extremes  
can still not check

the impulse of a roving hand,  
an errant wind, the will  
of some stray motion

which the world withholds from me.  
If I put the artifact  
into my pocket, after letting

my fingers play  
across its breadth,  
it could still leave me,

I would be powerless  
and still allowed to move.

Michael Janssen



wake forest university  
winston-salem, nc  
spring 1997

**THREE  
TO  
FOUR  
OUNCES**

**WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY  
FALL 1997**





**THE HUMAN SOUL WEIGHS THREE TO FOUR OUNCES.**  
**-DON DELILLO, *AMERICANA***



# THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

Fall 1997

LH1  
W4  
S78  
1997

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# Contents

## Art/Photography

Untitled.....	Mary Dillard.....	7
Roxbury Falls.....	Christine LaPorte.....	8
Liz I.....	Christine LaPorte.....	17
Untitled.....	Mary Dillard.....	18
Untitled.....	Dave Frisvold.....	23
Deep Thoughts.....	Melinda Zacher.....	24
Untitled.....	Kathleen Kuhnert.....	29
Untitled.....	Elizabeth Gray.....	30
Untitled.....	Karen Coachman.....	31
Untitled.....	Elizabeth Gray.....	32
Untitled.....	Christine LaPorte.....	45
New York Style.....	Mary Dillard.....	46
Untitled.....	Christine LaPorte.....	50
Fearless Freddie and His Wares 1.....		

## Prose

Meet Me at Six.....	Kate Cosgrove.....	10
A Reflection on a Pond.....	Andrew M. Arthur.....	25
Counter-Boy.....	Elizabeth O'Brien.....	36

## Poetry

Bone Dish.....	Douglas Crets.....	5
Ninety Six Years.....	Ryan Mails.....	6
i, giant.....	Jason McEnaney.....	9
Zen.....	Natalie Penland.....	16
Providential.....	Paul Fyfe.....	19
God sent a sinner woman to save me.....	Clinton Willburn, Jr.....	20
Untitled.....	Jane Oslislo.....	21
At Sleep.....	Douglas Crets.....	22
Irish and brittle.....	Jason McEnaney.....	27
Untitled.....	Paul Fyfe.....	28
Untitled.....	Jason McEnaney.....	33
Someday in the Downtown.....	Douglas Crets.....	34
The Hindu Poem.....	Carter Smith.....	44
During August.....	Douglas Crets.....	47
Untitled.....	Jane Oslislo.....	48
Permanence.....	Carter Smith.....	49



### Bone Dish

I place the dish  
on the windowsill.

I wait. It is late, and the words  
for this offering will not come.

I shed my skin  
and drop in my bones.

The birds will come  
out of the cedars

to dress the dish with life  
from the deepness of their throats.

Douglas Crets

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### Ninety Six Years

The city luxuriates across the valley,  
the groves are gone underneath.  
I was told that, once, the oranges  
licked at the San Gabriels;  
on nickel postcards, pioneer eccentric  
jalopies await the harvest crates,  
the tenant hands grinning for splinters.

In her certain Scot way, great-grandmother  
must have known it might have been different,  
the meticulous burlap shirts, the lights  
burning late on slaughtering day.  
Years later, there were days that didn't exist.  
Inching towards her deathbed,  
between the chrome of Chevy's on I 10,  
she seemed so lost. The grave is nearer.  
Along the road, the telephone poles grow black with age.  
She reminded God whispers through  
the streetlights also, breathing over gas stations.  
So soft in the bedroom, around her eyes.  
The voice lingers where she buried a  
young girl without a sound.  
So soft, the left behind and the kept,  
the going out and the coming in,  
the mountains and the back-hoe,  
shining like a ripened orange.

Ryan Mails



Mary Dillard



**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Roxbury Falls

Christine LaPorte

i, giant.

I listen to a tiny river  
flow angrily  
outside my window.

The black number 3  
on the bottom of the page  
is not an ant,

as I had suspected.

Jason McEnaney

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### Meet Me at Six

Kate Cosgrove

Web pulled up in the blue van and honked twice on Good Friday. Margery was never ready when people came to pick her up. She thought people wouldn't mind talking for a minute or two in the front room, while she searched for the other earring, or just a little bit of lotion to smooth over her hands, or maybe a stick of mint gum in case they were going to eat. But Web didn't really like to wait, so when Margery wasn't out on the front porch after the first two honks, he beeped again. Web wouldn't have thought to come into the house.

He was suspicious of the places where Margery migrated. This townhouse was better than the last, but maybe that was due to the fact that it didn't have furniture yet. In the apartment on St. Paul Street, Margery had tried to be too creative. Web thought-converting old planters into chip bowls, and a hollowed out log into a magazine holder. Decorating the stepladder with magazine cut-outs to make a living room chair hadn't really worked out either. Web had been made to sit on it all last Christmas eve, when she'd invited them all over for a midnight supper. That was also when Margery was supporting Porter- the 5th year studio art major at the University of Baltimore. Margery told them that they'd often spent their Saturdays in the train yard looking for "media" for Porter's projects. She hadn't used those terms lately, he thought. Not since Porter had left.

When Margery threw her bags onto the bench seat, Web pulled the van into reverse and pulled out onto Charles Street. He drove like their father, manipulating the gear stick with a strong forearm, and then spinning the wheel with just the inner tip of his thumb. It was more like a captain sailing a ship than a college boy edging a mini-van into the lunch hour traffic. Their parents had passed the family vehicle down to their youngest son when he entered college. It was not they were sick of driving a van, it was rather that they had grown tired of driving down to pick their children up for every holiday. Now that Mr. Bell had started selling Amway products, the Bells had become increasingly busier, as well.

Margery and Web were driving to their parents house for the Easter weekend. They never called it their house because neither Margery, Web, nor their brother Dean had grown up there. The family had always lived in Baltimore, until six months ago when Sawyer Bell had accepted a new job in Philadelphia. Sawyer had always sworn that he would

never uproot the family from Baltimore, but when his most knowledgeable secretary had quit for the third time in the past year- this time to follow her boyfriend in a traveling carnival- he decided that the offering in Philadelphia looked pretty good. He was tired after twenty years of managing the family insurance company. He was especially tired of being walked over by the secretaries and their children. He always let the children come to the office when the baby-sitters called in sick- which seemed to happen about once a week. He'd let Rhonda set up her son's playpen in the back office with him, because it was too big to fit in the main room. Usually he ended up taking the children for walks to the Seven-Eleven for snacks, just so that Rhonda and Lynn could answer the phones in peace and quiet. Margery found the whole situation hopeless and ironic, but Sawyer shrugged it off as one of the hitches of running a small company.

"So I hear you've got your own radio show now," Margery said as they came to an abrupt halt at the stoplight. "Yes. I'm the host." "WRCR- Roanoke College Radio- we do a 1 a.m. show on the in-depth lives of college basketball players. Chet's just set up an appointment for us to travel to San Diego to see the home residence of Randy Eakins- from Carolina. They say he'll go number one in the draft."

"Mmmhmm," she said. "But why do you need to go to San Diego to see where he used to live?"

"I don't know, Chet set the appointment up. It's of public interest I guess. Dad said he might like to go too."

Typical, thought Margery. She loved her brother fiercely, but she'd always thought he'd invested a lot of energy in peculiar causes.

"Let's stop at Greg's," Margery suggested. "We can take Dad some of those combination bagels, that he likes."

"The kind with sesame and poppy seeds on them?" Web asked.

"Yeah, and I'll get some chocolate chip for the road." Web reached into his back corduroy pocket and handed her a five dollar bill, just as the van swung into the Belvedere Market. Margery adjusted her skirt, and slung the brown straw purse over her shoulder before making her way into Greg's Bagels. An overweight woman with a short crop of marbled gray hair, and a gypsy skirt was leaning over the counter speaking very closely with Greg. Margery had seen her in the shop many times, and she sensed that the woman considered herself to be a very good friend of Greg, although she wasn't sure the feeling was mutual. Margery recognized these types from when she worked at Applebees Grill. They came into the restaurant often and tried to pretend that they were in with the managers, just because they showed up every day. They tended to irritate Margery, because



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

they would walk past her hostess stand, thinking that they could just return to where they had been sitting the day before. Margery had always wanted to remind them that it was a chain restaurant after all, and not the corner grill where it actually meant something if you knew the manager.

Margery looked at the chalkboard of daily specials, and decided that maybe she would get a hot bagel sandwich instead of her usual toasted cinnamon raisin. Hmm...she thought, she couldn't decide between the baked brie and raspberry jam with toasted almonds on a plain bagel, or the Monterey Jack and black bean spread on a Jalapeño Southern cornbread bagel. She thought the raspberry jam would make her mouth thirsty in the car, and she wasn't sure that she had enough money to get a bottled drink- Greg only sold the expensive waters and juices- the kind whose labels said that they'd been bottled near a spring in Maine. She quickly decided to get the Monterey Jack. The customer ahead of her- a biker whose back was shaped like a question mark, causing her to think that he biked too often- was making an enormous ordeal of paying in exact change. He proceeded to reach into a leather fanny pack hugging his waist to extract a ziplock bag filled with coins. "Two-fifty-two" he finally pronounced with a lisp, stacking the coins in a neat arrangement in front of the register. Margery was growing impatient, thinking of Web who was by now probably tapping his knuckles on the roof of the van.

"I'm ready," she said, inserting herself next to the cyclist at the counter. He and the worker looked at her in surprise, she'd apparently disrupted their exchange when announcing that she was ready to be helped.

"Well, don't be offended, you can carry on the conversation, after Greg's closes," resounded a voice from behind Margery. She tried to crane her neck to see who it was, but she couldn't do so without first finishing the order and without looking obviously surprised that someone had agreed with her. Turning from the counter a moment later, she glanced at a dumpy figure in a double knit blazer, a black tee-shirt and black jeans. Mafia, she assumed, and decided to run out to the car to let Web know that the order had taken a little longer than expected.

"Margery! Margery Bell, right!" The cat burglar/Italian man was suddenly in front of her, pulling off his sunglasses as if to suggest that she recognize him. "You dated Porter Svali, right? The Margery that always worn brown?" He smirked, pointing to the brown chenille sweater around her waist.

"Vic Santino"- he thrust out a khaki colored hand armed with a collection of gold jewelry. His hand alone could set off a metal detector at the airport, Margery thought, reaching out to claim its grasp.

"I came to your apartment last winter for that fondue and cappuccino thing you two had. I'm a childhood friend of Porter's."

Margery remembered him. He had driven in from New Jersey with a girlfriend who wore a lot of black also. Margery remembered that she had carried a black leather shoulder bag with her the whole evening, making calls on a cellular phone that she produced from the bag from time to time. Margery remembered that she had asked "Vic" who his girlfriend was calling. "Oh just her cousin," he'd replied. "She's getting married soon, and she needs help with the wedding." It had still been a lot of phone calls for a two hour party, Margery remembered.

"Yeah, I remember you Vic, but can you hold on- my brother's waiting in the car. Margery bounded out to the van, nearly dodging a Chinese lady driving a Volvo station wagon. She leaned into the passenger window, noticing that Web was fairly occupied trying to attach a transistor radio antenna to the roof of the van. Web liked to use the radio to ask truckers where the best rest stops and restaurants were when he made long road trips. "Web, I'll be right out. The bagels are almost ready, and I just met somebody I used to know," she said.

"Yep, um Marge, do you think you could find me some twine or something to keep this antenna on?" he asked.

"Uh, yeah," she answered, knowing that by the time she came back, he would have forgotten about the twine.

The bagels were ready by the time she reentered Greg's, and Vic was lounging in a rocking chair reading the City Paper. "So Vic, what brings you back to Baltimore?" she asked.

"The restaurant. We're relocating."

"The restaurant?" Margery asked, wondering if she was supposed to remember the restaurant.

"Well, actually it's Pop's restaurant, but we're making the big move from Little Italy tonight. Pop felt that it was time to get out of there, so we purchased some land out by the mall, and tonight we're having the grand opening. We figured, Good Friday, you know- no meat- a lot of people will be eating pasta."

"Oh, okay- Santino's right, I think I've seen it downtown."

"Well, actually no. That's not us. It's Vic's. But close, that's our cousin's place."

Margery was a little disappointed. It seemed that the advantage of having a name like Santino, was naming a restaurant after it. Vic's sounded more like a sub shop than fine Italian dining.



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

"But actually, Margery, it's not just a coincidence that I ran into you here today."

"It's not a coincidence?"

"No. I talked to Porter yesterday, because I wanted to find you, and he gave me your address. He said your number was unlisted."

Margery had followed her mother's advice to have an unlisted number if she was going to live in Baltimore City and wait tables at a restaurant where people could easily find out her last name. Her mother would be disillusioned if she could see that "Vic" had outrun the system.

"So I came by your house this morning, just as you were leaving with some guy in a van," he continued.

"Oh, my brother," she explained.

"Yeah, so anyway, when I saw that you were coming here, I followed you in, because I have something really important to ask you."

"Well, what?" asked Margery, worrying that the Monterey Jack cheese on her sandwich was getting cold.

"You see I need a maitre-de to work at the restaurant, actually I promised Pop that I'd find one. Niccola just quit yesterday, when she found out that Pop had been two-timing her, and we desperately need someone for tonight. I remembered that you used to hostess, and well Porter told me about the magazine, so you know I figured..." his voice was laced with embarrassment.

Margery recalled for almost the sixth time that day, her most painstaking tragedy-the reason why Porter had moved back onto campus, and left her in the empty house. The reason why she couldn't afford to purchase a drink with lunch. The reason why Web had to pick her up to go to Philly instead of her taking the train like she used to do. The reason why she could leave on a Friday to spend a trivial holiday weekend with her family, instead of leaving on a Saturday or Sunday like every other person who held a job. The magazine had folded in February, taking with it her most prized position as the city arts critic. She'd been to humiliated to return to waiting tables, and since then had spent most of her time trying to reorganize everything around her. She had alphabetized her CD collection, and spent days making lists- writing down things like "take out trash" and "feed cats," just so that her days at least looked busy from an observer's glance. She would carefully place a checkmark next to each task, before going to bed each night, and then tuck the notepad into a shoebox next to her bed. Margery flushed, thinking of the possibility of anyone reading her lists, and realizing how trivial her life had become.

"Oh, it's okay Vic, I'm over that phase in my life. I was beginning to get annoyed with the artsy people in Baltimore anyway," she said referring to the job at the magazine. "You know it was always the same old story- nobody like these people in high school, and then BAM- they move to the city, produce a piece of junk that sits in a low maintenance art gallery, everyone thinks they're a wonder, and they wind up being profiled in the front section of Arts & Entertainment.

"You're referring to Porter, I take it," he grinned.

"Well yeah- why not," she rolled her eyes.

"Well I can guarantee that no one artsy will be hanging out at Vic's if you want the job. Especially since its in the mall. I bet artists detest malls."

Margery considered the direction in which her life was taking her. Until ten minutes ago she thought for certain that she was headed for Philadelphia in a light blue mini-van- returning to the stable but unconventional family that had launched her into this swirling, tangled cocoon that had become her life. She could continue to make lists until the notepad was full, and she could organize the countless objects that feigned to conceal the vacuum in her home. Or she could leave all of this to appease a man standing before her in a cheap sport coat who had sorely annoyed her a year ago, but didn't seem to right now. She could work for him and his father in what was now becoming a chain restaurant- something that she and Porter had both detested- seating customers who had followed Vic and his family to a new location at the mall.

At one time, everything about this way of life would have revolted her, but now it didn't seem like a bad option. The thought of "Vic's" flashing in a fluorescent script above a one story stucco building with violin music droning from an outdoor intercom, made her laugh.

"You'd need to meet me there at six tonight," Vic started. "I know you think I'm crazy, but I need you Margery."

She thought of her parents sitting down to a grilled tuna dinner tonight, talking about her soon to be reignited career as a journalist. She thought of Web talking about his radio show between mouthfuls of bread, and Dean concentrating on his plate, and knew that they'd all understand. There was time for change, after all.

"I'll meet you at 6:00," she said, thinking of the feeling that her father's secretary must have had, when she'd kicked the desk drawer shut with the heel of her shoe and left the office with the joyful anticipation of a traveling carnival waiting for her outside.

Zen

Transcendence seems no prize to me-  
monks simply aren't as wise as they look.  
Just when I think that reality is pure  
I wake to find that a sweet boy  
has found his way into my bed.  
That beneath the perfect sky  
I am tangled in boxer shorts  
and stained, red-flowered sheets.  
Zen is only a game of innumerable  
wishes and words and confusions.  
But I- I am too much and too real  
and I'll tell you, honey  
I'd rather fuck a monk than believe one.

Natalie Penland



Liz I

Christine LaPorte

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES



Mary Dillard



**Providential**  
(for Ammons)

every thing that is  
new has once been

felt some time before  
the words came out

with the strength to forget  
the world again breathing

those quiet ideas into  
an every day voice

Paul Fyfe



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

God sent a sinner woman to save me

God sent a sinner woman to save me  
He knew me  
He knew what i needed

yeah she dranks  
she even smoke dank  
but i fuck up too

she's not the best woman in the world  
but she says she loves me  
she's mine

He knew what i needed  
He put me with my kind  
the Bible says equally yoked

what would i look like with a queen  
i had one  
the shit didn't work out

i'm in love with a bitch i caint stand  
i caint stand the bitch i'm in love with  
i'm in love with a bitch

but in love nonetheless  
i'm blessed  
thank ya Lord

Clinton Willburn, Jr.

I'm standing on the dock. The waters jump  
up through the planks and laugh at the boat boy.

I've got shoes like paper bags on my feet,  
and my money's on the gray two-seater.

The boat boy kicks the regular green like  
an annoying sibling, and it begs him

as he walks past me on the dock after  
he's tied it. The boat boy becomes bail boy

and he sits and spills and spits, scoops water  
off the floor of the boat. His aimless, quick

bailer beats to the rocking, and the wind  
tosses the water back onto the seats.

He knows the sun will dry them, and he gives  
my father instruction on the motor.

Jane Oslislo

At Sleep

I am a woman lost from her children.  
I count splinters in the door jamb.

I listen to the moths outside. I hear their names  
against the halogen, tapping.

I turn to my mumbles and nod as I push  
one thread under another silently.

I scuttle into musky hallways singing  
for blood. I stop to rest, beating

my walls with water. I amble, from room  
to room, to wood with sleep.

I am back to bed before sun-up, leaning  
with my muscles into breathing.

Douglas Crets



Dave Frisvold



Deep Thoughts

Melinda Zacher

## A Reflection on a Pond

Andrew M. Arthur

It's been almost ten years since I've been to the pond I learned to fish in. I thought about that the other day and wondered where the time goes- twenty years seems like eons when it passes, and a minute when it's behind you. Hundreds of faces have come and gone in the years between, countless lessons learned, and possibly even more forgotten. I've been madly in love with girls whose middle names I cannot even recall, been best of friends with people whose location to me is now a mystery, and yet I still remember that pond.

Not simply to say I can recall its name, or how to find it if I traveled back there, but to say that I recall it completely in my mind, more faithfully than any photograph frozen in time. I can picture it perfectly alive, every inch of its shoreline down to each tree, stump, and stone. I can recall where it emptied into a stream which ran alongside it; I can recall where the fish used to spawn in the early summer, and where they would retreat in the wintertime. Each overhanging branch which shadowed the movements of my elusive opponent is engraved indelibly into my mind.

I could not even presume to tell you the clothes I wore or the facts I was learning in school when I was ten, and in fact, they were really of no consequence to me. And yet I could still tell you when and where I caught the fish that I did. I don't simply remember fishing when I was ten, I swear I can remember *each day* that I fished; I remember which lures I have lost on the stump that rose out of the water on the west end of the pond (long removed by ice skaters since) and the disappointment that followed. Fishing also provided my first practical outlet and experience at swearing.

Learning to fish provided me with a sense of wonder at nature that has remained with me for years, and which I can never escape. I learned about biology: food chains, ecosystems, and survival of the fittest. I learned a lot about fishing itself, techniques and strategy. I learned a little about compassion, and a hell of a lot about patience; maybe the kind of patience that only a fisherman knows.

And as much as I learned, I don't think I've ever found a place where I've done as much thinking as I did at that pond. I thought about everything a boy could think about, and everything still made sense when I stood on the shore with rod in hand. I wondered at all the questions of life that a ten-year old could fathom, and I didn't expect answers- I didn't want them. I just wanted to wonder, and that was perhaps the purest feeling I can



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

ever recall in my life. Sometimes I just wondered how deep it was in the deepest part in the middle. I never found out, and frankly I don't ever want to know. For a ten-year old boy, it was as deep as I wanted it to be.

I don't know if I dare ever go back there. The world away from the pond has created a cynic inside the mind of the ten-year old who fished there once, and I fear that he might cast a stone to the middle of the pond and belie its fathomic depths. The cynical teenager inside is slowly fading away like so many other things lacking real significance in life, and his interest in throwing stones is fading as well.

So I think it's time for the ten-year old to start running the show again. Hell, his grades were good, and he was somewhat of a dreamer; I hear there's a place for people like that these days.

And let's not forget that he was a damn good fisherman.

### Irish and brittle

*i was sitting in mcsorley's* once, too  
a pasty waiter in a starched white coat  
served roast beef and pale ale, wisecracking and clattering  
thick, dirty mugs,  
three in each hand, creased bills between finger tips.

hunched men in black pants, black socks and black shoes  
shuffle in sawdust, carve the bar with dingy fingernails.  
i lift off a grimy bench and exit the tavern, unnoticed,  
feeling Irish and brittle,

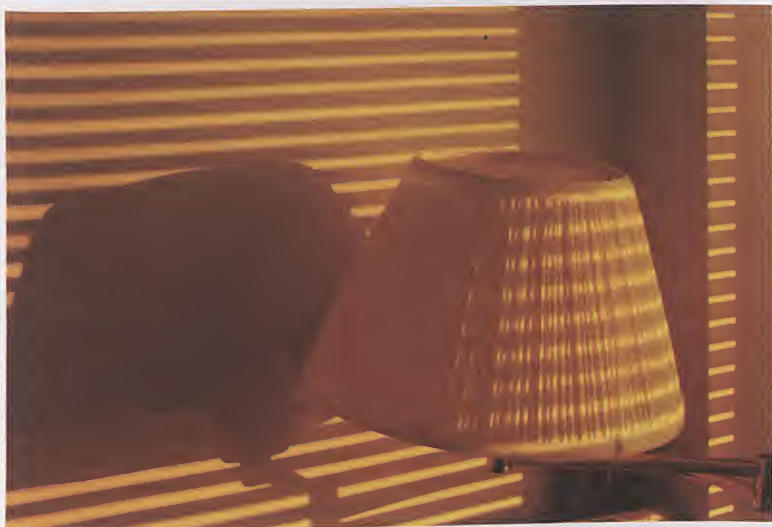
like the delicate arrangement of dyed, green carnations  
sent to my grandfather's funeral by Howard Hopkins.

Jason McEnaney

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

Bulrush basket hadda name on't.  
Couden see me nothin s'early  
Buddamif Iyaint hungry sose  
Mebbieyah coud catch't.  
Marge semmie sum food?  
Shit if Iyaint jussoak m'leg  
Innadam hole!... Wul-dam!  
There't goes afloatin.  
Summon elses lunch uhguess.  
Imownbee summon elses lunch  
Ifadont gemmeupoutta d'river!  
Dairza sun cuminup;  
Hopee got mah name on'm.  
Buhwhere d'hellsmapot?  
*O'ahben trine t'keep adreamin,*  
*Ha'sleep furdinner ever'night...*

Paul Fyfe



Kathleen Kuhnert

**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Elizabeth Gray



Karen Coachman



**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Elizabeth Gray

*for Steven*

weathered and splintered;  
skulls of skunks, moles,  
coy-dogs, dairy cows-  
excavated from muddied catacombs  
on our foothill of the Adirondacks.

run-off trickled through eye-holes  
and nostrils, smoothing edges,  
dislodging jawbones, loosening teeth.  
we lifted them out, bare-handed,  
lined them in a corner on our deck,

on a bed of brown, orange, carmel leaves,  
and pond grass.

Jason McEnaney

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

#### Someday in the Downtown

I will be the grocer in a dim-lit borough  
east of the river. Near the corner of Wisteria and Paterson

with zucchini and rutabaga laid out;  
and some gorgeous Vidalias, lonely

in their wooden crates. She would be my neighbor  
who was beautiful once but has since slipped

into grace, waking up early every morning  
to open the cleaners across the street.

She spends all day  
pressing shirts into forms,

taking out spots,  
dying the troubled garments.

And at night, seeing my back lights flip on  
she will cross the strange and tattered street

to me, sitting on a stack of books, already  
putting away the change drawer.

She will sit down. Then I will deal cards.  
We might talk about the weather, or her feet.

It will go on like this until I get sleepy  
and she is the one talking, mostly about herself.

I won't mind. I hadn't before. It is like  
everything I ever wanted. Just her voice

chanting in the back of the store. Me, her words,  
and the luscious gleam from the canned goods

stacked against the night. I will be beautiful  
I am sure of it.

Douglas Crets

### Counter-Boy

Elizabeth O'Brien

Oona Frank sat at her desk staring out the front window of Murray's Carpeting. She was supposed to be answering the phone while her boss, Larry Murray, showed a young couple some samples towards the back of the store. But the phone wasn't ringing, and, since the young couple, no one had come into Murray's for almost an hour.

Oona was bored. She sat staring out at the highway, watching the cars zoom by. Nobody was really interested in buying carpeting, so nobody was stopping to come into Murray's. Oona couldn't blame them: who could think about carpeting when it was so hot out? Even for July, there was a horrendous heat wave going on. Despite the fact that the air-conditioning in Murray's was set on high, if she so much as climbed to the top of the ladder in the storage room to tag an Oriental, Oona could feel her temperature rise. Every morning for two weeks now the short distance from her little brown Subaru to the front door of Murray's was like a crossing of the Sahara. And, each evening, the weatherman on the t.v. cheerfully reported that there was no end in sight. So the thought of carpeting- all that hot, sticky fiber clinging to your feet- made Oona cringe. She was happy to stay put at the front desk and well away from the stacks of Du Pont stainmasters, rugs and samples. People with nice, cool hard-wood floors are probably thanking their lucky stars right about now, she thought.

But still a phone call would be nice- but the phone hardly ever rang at Murray's, even when business was steady. Carpeting didn't elicit too much conversation, Oona had discovered. It was pretty much cut and dry: either somebody wanted carpeting or they didn't. So most days Oona sat biting her nails and watching the cars go by. She had gotten the job at Murray's through her friend Deana almost three years ago. Deana Ann Murray was Oona's oldest and closest friend. She and her family had lived next door to Oona and Oona's Mama for as long as anybody could remember. The Murrays were a big, comfortable family with a ton of brothers and cousins and aunts and uncles, and Deana was the youngest- and only- girl. She and Oona had grown up together, gone to high school together, and they were the best of friends. But unlike Oona, Deana was always getting into some kind of trouble growing up, whether it be running around with rough kids or dating some no good guy. In fact, just a few days after she graduated from Hart High, Deana picked up and followed one of these no good guys all the way to California- leaving her Mama and Daddy frantic, and the front desk of Murray's Carpeting



empty. Oona had come down later that same week to look at some powder-blue shag for her Mama bathroom. Oona thought that the Murrays might be mad at her for not trying harder to hang onto Deana, but instead they offered her Deana's old job on the spot. Oona hadn't really planned on taking the job right away- she thought she might just look around a bit before settling into something- but her Mama had thought it was a good idea. Her Mama said that a young girl needed her own money so she could do what she wanted. Oona always listened to her Mama advice, so her career at Murray's Carpeting began.

Looking out at the litter-lined, heat wilted highway, Oona reflected on her time at Murray's. It wasn't a bad job, really. Her boss Larry was Deana's oldest brother. He was alright to work for as long as Oona remembered to get customers the right carpeting and didn't stare out the window too much. But sometimes Oona would get flustered and ring up the wrong price, and then he'd get mad and give her nasty looks from the back of the store. Oona hated for that to happen, and she tried to do everything right, but there were so many colors and sizes! But, all in all, things were fine at Murray's Carpeting, even though nothing much exciting happened. But, no, Oona mentally corrected herself, that wasn't entirely true. After all, she had met Clem at Murray's.

Clem Frank was Oona's husband. They had met when Clem had come into Murray's to deliver a package- he was a U.P.S. man- and struck up a conversation with Oona, who was, as usual, sitting quietly at the front desk. Oona thought Clem seemed like a nice man, so she had somewhat shyly given him her phone number after he'd somewhat shyly asked her for it. He had called the next week and they'd gone out for pizza and a movie, which had turned into a second date and then a third. Oona had never had a real boyfriend before Clem. The boys in her high school had gone for girls like Deana, girls with lots of energy and that were tall and blond and talked a lot. The few double dates that Deana had managed to drag Oona on had all been disasters, with Deana going off into the back seat or the bushes with her guy, leaving Oona tongue tied and trying to keep her date's hands where she could see them.

But being with Clem was different. He liked to take Oona out to eat at restaurants and to go bowling and to Hart Park on Sundays. He liked to laugh out loud and tell her about all the funny things that happened to him when he was delivering people's packages. He didn't even mind suffering his Mama cooking every once in a while, and for these reasons Oona gladly became his girlfriend. That, and that Clem didn't seem to mind when Oona didn't talk very much- he just filled the silence himself.

Pretty soon Clem asked Oona to marry him. They hadn't been going together very long- only about six months or so- but Clem wanted to buy a house for them out near where his family lived in Coatesville.



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

"It'll be great," he had said to Oona after offering her the ring, a little diamond half the size of her pinky nail. "The house is perfect for us, and it's only two miles from Mama and Daddy's. You can still work at Murray's if you want, and you'll be able to see your Mama all the time. It really isn't that far away, you'll see." He had looked so hopeful and sweet kneeling on her Mama champagne-blush carpet that Oona hadn't known what to say. She hadn't ever given much thought to marriage. She had thought that she might go out to California to see Deana for awhile. Did people really get married so fast? She wondered how they could decide everything so quickly.

But Clem had his heart set on the little house in Coatesville. He worked so hard delivering packages and running around, Oona considered, and he didn't really ever complain much. She hated to disappoint him. And her Mama had loved the idea: "Just think of all the barbecues you two can have in that lovely house," she'd encouraged. "...And Christmas parties together, and babies! Oona, it is *so* important to have someone to plan things with, you know..."

Oona thought about what her Mama said. Some of it sounded good, like the part about having someone to share things with. So she said yes to Clem's proposal and they were married that next spring in the Hart Methodist Church. After that they moved into their new house and Clem started working for the U.P.S. branch in Coatesville. Oona kept her job at Murray's. Clem had been right: it wasn't that far really, only about an hour right on the highway if there wasn't any traffic.

On this particular scorching, July day that Oona sat day-dreaming at the front desk of Murray's, she had been a married woman for almost five years. She and Clem still lived in their little house in Coatesville, working everyday and managing to make ends meet pretty nicely. Oona heard from Deana whenever she had men troubles- which was fairly often- but she was doing well out in California and planning to buy her own mobile home. Oona's Mama was fine, and Clem's Mama and Daddy were as healthy as ever. Yup, other than the awful heat, Oona assured herself, everything was just fine.

She glanced at the clock over top of the front door: four-forty-five. Only fifteen minutes left till she could clock out and head home. The thought of dragging herself to the car in the terrible heat almost made Oona wish that she could stay indoors in the a.c. all night. But suddenly she brightened at the thought of maybe going down to the Hart Tavern for a cold beer after she left Murray's. She and Clem used to go there all the time before they were married; they would sit at the bar, and Clem would watch Sports Center. He wouldn't talk to Oona much, but she was just as happy to chat with the waitresses, girls she'd gone to high school with, when they weren't busy. Why not call Clem at home and ask him to drive down there and meet her, like old times? She had just about decided to pick up the phone and call when it suddenly rang, causing Oona to let out a startled

"Oh!," loud enough for her boss to hear. Larry Murray glanced towards the desk, rolling his eyes at her before turning back to the young couple.

"Sorry," Oona said softly in his direction before picking up the phone. She took a deep breath and tried to sound professional. "Murray's Carpeting this is Oona speaking how may I help you?"

"Hey, Oona, is that you?" It was Clem. She was surprised but pleased. He almost never called her at work.

"Yes, it's me, hi, honey. Is everything o.k.?"

"Yeah, fine. I just got home a little early..."

"Oh, you're home early? That's great," Oona broke in excitedly, "...because I was going to leave here soon and I was wondering..."

"Yeah, that's why I called, 'cause we're out of beer and there's nothing to eat in the whole house. I was thinking you could stop off on your way home and pick up some stuff at the store." Oona could hear the din of the television set over Clem's voice. She pictured him stretched out on the couch, still wearing his mud-colored uniform, watching the Simpsons.

"Well, yeah, I guess I could..." she said slowly, and then, remembering her plan, "...But I was thinking maybe we could go down to the tavern tonight for awhile. You know we always used to have fun..."

"Nah, I don't think so, not tonight, babe," Clem said. "I was all over God's creation today, and I'm way too tired to think about getting off this couch for at least ten hours." Oona thought about Clem's habit of saying the phrase "God's creation." He was always saying it, and how he'd spent his day running all over it. Depending on how tired he was he'd sometimes prescribe himself extended couchtime of twelve or even twenty-four hours. "...But if you could get the food on your way home and maybe some Coors Light that would be good, o.k.?"

Oona envisioned Clem flicking channels and drinking a six-pack all night- his typical routine- and felt a mild flash of annoyance. She wondered how tired he'd be if she said she was going to the tavern without him: he'd probably hightail it down there real quick. But the thought of going to a bar by herself was silly. What on earth would she do there, alone? Oona sighed. "Yeah, sure. I'll pick up some stuff."

"Great, babe... Oh, and don't forget to get some of those Utz's potato chips, too, if they've got 'em."

"O.k., I will. I'll see you in a bit."

"Yeah, o.k. Later, babe."

Oona hung up the phone in time to watch her boss ushering the young couple out of the store with an armload of catalogs and samples.

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

"Come back anytime this week, we're open nine to five, even on Sundays..." he chirped to their retreating backs. "...And try to keep cool in this heat!" He waved as they got in their car and drove away. Turning to Oona his smiling face tightened.

"Please try to limit you're personal phone calls, Mrs. Frank," he said icily. Oona thought how odd it was that she'd known Larry Murray her whole life- she had played spin-the-bottle with him in sixth grade!- and he insisted on referring to her as "Mrs. Frank" in the store. "And try to pay more attention to your work. You mismatched the tags on that new shipment from Kennett Square- that's the second time you've done that this month!"

"I'm sorry, La- Mr. Murray," Oona said anxiously. "It won't happen again, I promise. I'll pay more attention next time."

"Please see that you do." His mustache still twitching in annoyance, Larry Murray walked to the back of the store to count the day's money. Noticing the time, Oona got up from her desk and shut off all the lights and set the alarm system. Larry Murray locked the front door behind them as they both exited the building.

"Have a good night, Mr. Murray!" Oona called to him as he opened the door to his Nissan. He raised a hand in farewell but didn't turn around. Oona got into her car gingerly, mindful of the blazing hot steering wheel. She waved to her boss as he pulled out onto the highway in front of her. Really she felt bad about making Larry Murray so angry all the time. But still, deep-down, she hoped that he burned his pointy little butt on the leather interior of his car. It would serve him right.

Oona zipped along the four-lane highway with the windows rolled all the way up and the a.c. blasting. She couldn't seem to shake the dreamy mood that had pervaded her work day- and so bothered Larry Murray. As she rolled through the middle of the town of Hart she found herself thinking back to the days that she and Clem were first together. Right there at Hart Park was where they had spent their fifth date eating ice cream even though it was forty-five degrees outside. Oona had thought Clem was crazy to want ice cream, but he had convinced her, and they had had rock-road and played on the swings until their hands and feet finally went numb and they had to go home. As Oona exited the highway it occurred to her that she and Clem hadn't done that kind of thing together in a long time. But that was o.k.: Clem would surely spend more time with her if he could. He was just really busy working all the time.

Oona parked the car in front of the bright green BP and got out, trying to remember all the things they needed at the house. She swung open the door to the convenience store and was met with a cool blast of air-conditioning.

"Ahhh..." Oona murmured under her breath. She liked the BP. It was so cool and clean all the time. It was much nicer than the big, bustling A&P in Coatesville- everybody



there always seemed to be in a hurry. She picked up a bright green shopping basket and started to look for the things she needed. She wished she could do all her shopping at the BP.

"A little hot out there, huh?" The boy behind the counter addressed Oona conversationally as she roamed the aisles. She was the only customer in the store.

"Yes, very," she responded shyly. Talking to people she didn't know very well made her a little nervous. But the counter-boy seemed friendly enough to Oona. He was very young, she noticed, maybe 17 or 18, and had long, colorless hair tucked unevenly behind multi-pierced ears. A row of thick silver bracelets decorated each of his skinny wrists. Probably still in high school, she thought, where everybody tries to look cool. Oddly she was suddenly reminded of Clem. It was hard to imagine him dressing to look cool or impress anybody. What, she wondered, had he been like when he was younger? Oona hadn't known him back then, although she'd seen pictures. She'd seen the framed photos at his Mama and Daddy's of Clem's high school proms, his big football games, his graduation. Certainly she'd seen the highlights.

But what had Clem been like, really? Had he wanted things for himself? Surely he must have: he'd wanted things when they first got married, things for both of them. He'd wanted to take her to Italy, she remembered, and for some reason this brought the surprise prick of tears to her eyes. He'd wanted to start his own business someday. She was going to help him get it off the ground. Yes, he had wanted things. So had she. But things had changed, and then-Oona's not tears brimmed and threatened to fall-remained steadfastly the same. No matter how hard she had stared and searched the old photographs, her husband's grainy, young face remained a stranger's.

The bell above the BP's front door suddenly tinkled shrilly, startling Oona and signaling an incoming customer. She had been wandering around, she realized, and with an empty shopping basket, mooning over the candy aisle and crying at the soda case. The counter-boy must think she was crazy. She had to get out of here, now, and never mind Clem's damn Utz's. She set the basket down with a clatter and walked quickly towards the door, wiping away the embarrassing tears with the back of her hand.

"Have a nice night!" The counter boy called after her. Oona didn't hear him.

She drove home slowly in order to collect herself, hiccuping a little and mashing her fists into her eyes to stop herself from crying. Pretty soon her head ached and her nose was running but her sobs subsided. Really Clem was a good guy, and they got along well enough. She was just being silly and having a bad day. Maybe it was PMS.

It was hot in the house when Oona got home. After turning up the air a notch she found Clem just as she had imagined him, lying on the sofa watching t.v. He roused

### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

himself and padded into the kitchen just as Oona tiredly set her purse and car keys down on the table.

"Where's the food?" he said anxiously, searching around for a shopping bag. His hopeful eyes settled on Oona's handbag as if she was hiding his potato chips in there, just for a fun game.

"Sorry, I, uh...I forgot to stop by the store." Oona went to the freezer and opened it to avoid Clem's gaze. "...But there's some chicken parmesan in here I could heat up for you. I think your Mama made it..."

"No, no, dammit, forget it. I need some *good* food, not leftovers...." Clem said with a scowl. He turned and walked back into the living room empty handed.

Oona sighed and shut the freezer door, noticing a scribbled message on it that Deana had called. Oona was glad for the opportunity to talk with her friend: Deana could always cheer her up. She picked up the phone and quickly dialed Deana's California number. It only rang once before Deana answered.

"Oona, that better be you, 'cause I've got some *news!*" Deana exclaimed breathlessly into the phone. Oona smiled and said yes, it was her, and what was going on to make Deana sound so excited? There was a short pause on the other end of the line in which Oona knew her friend was taking a deep breath in preparation for her story.

"Girl, I'm getting *married!*" Deana fairly shrieked into the receiver, making Oona wince. "...His name is Charlie Moore and he's *wonderful*, Oona..."

"What do you mean you're getting married? I've heard that one before..." She couldn't be serious. Oona felt something cold and tight grip her heart.

"...No really, I am, Oona. I got a ring- it's so pretty!- and we've got a church date set and everything..."

Oona listened while Deana rattled on about her fiancée. He was thirty-two, a landscaper, and had blue eyes and blond hair. They had met at the bar where Deana worked. They went hiking together and to the beach and took trips up North to see his family. He was perfect for her, Deana said.

"Sounds like it," Oona said softly.

"Oh he *is*, girl, and I just know you're going to love him! The wedding's August tenth- less than a month away, can you believe that? I told him it was too soon but, hell, I don't really care. I'd marry him today if he'd have me!" Deana laughed, the happiness in her voice crackling over her phone line. Oona didn't say anything. "...Hey, girl, are you still there? You've gone and got all quiet on me. Shocked, huh?"

"Sorry, I'm here. Yeah, shocked." Oona tried to focus on her friend's words. She

knew she should sound excited. No doubt Deana expected her to be. "....I'm really happy for you, Deana. I can't wait to meet him."

"Neither can I, girl. 'Cause you're going to love him, just like I do!" Oona listened for another twenty minutes to Deana's extensive wedding plans. Her dress was all picked out and ready, as were the flowers and the caterers. She sounded all set.

"I'll give you a call in a few days to let you know how things are going, keep you posted, you know..." Deana giggled. "I've got to call Mama and Daddy next. Are they going to *die* or what?" Then they said their good-byes and after Oona had told Deana again how happy she was for her they hung up.

"How's Deana doing? Still raising hell?" Clem asked Oona as she walked slowly into the living room. He was still lying on the couch. Oona sat down next to him, making him move his feet onto the ground to give her room. She hoped he didn't mind. His body smelled stale, like couch and packages.

"She's fine. Says she's getting married next month."

"Really? Well, I'll be damned. Isn't her Mama gonna love that." Clem smiled and squirmed farther away from his wife so he could see the t.v. better. "Where's the wedding going to be?"

"California. I'm matron of honor." Oona stared at the television. Clem had it turned to some situation comedy she'd never seen before. Apparently it was pretty funny: the studio audience was laughing uproariously. Oona figured it must be a laugh-track.

"California? Now how the hell does she expect everyone to get all the way out there?" Clem regarded Oona. "And it's next month? There's no way I can get off work so soon. Talk about short notice, shit..." He shook his head and turned back towards the t.v., clicking the channel changer in exasperation. "You're just going to have to call her back and tell her we can't make it."

Oona didn't respond. She was imagining Larry Murray at his sister's wedding. She wondered if his little mustache would bob up and down when he danced at the reception. Maybe he would loosen up and be nice for a change.

They sat in silence for a bit while Clem flicked between baseball and an adventure movie on HBO. Oona thought about calling her Mama, but it was getting late, and she was afraid she'd wake her. Instead she sat gazing at a grease stain just above the t.v. stand, thinking about Deana and her landscaper. Pretty soon the weatherman came on and told them it would be hot again tomorrow.

"Big freaking surprise!" Clem shouted at the television set.



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

#### The Hindu Poem

In the clamor of striking balls and scattering pins,  
I know there is god.

A team of bowlers is not holy in collars of polyester.  
Fingers wide in the gouged holes of a damaged ball, they rise to disturb  
the symmetry of ten pins  
and keep score.

Who pauses to meditate: what has been here before me  
in these shoes? Or wonders at the theory of connection,  
why the pins must be raised and cleared *mechanically*  
from the lanes where  
they are doomed to fall?

If they would listen in the moment before  
the three count step begins, the pins would hum  
their secret

and make it known that  
to accept destruction easily,  
one must be  
at home in the world.

Carter Smith



New York Style

Christine LaPorte

**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Mary Dillard

### During August

In the North Loup River my sister  
holds a flashlight on my body  
while I wash with handfuls of sand

from the bank. I am moving slowly  
as if reading a psalm across my torso.  
I look carefully at myself

though I am ashamed to do so. I dip deeply  
my fingers in the night water  
without a sound, without using my voice.

I call this praying, in a place between the sound  
of irrigation sprinklers ticking off  
and strings of fishing line darning the river. Soon

it is not me. It is just this body  
cleaning in the pull of brown water  
down through the farms.

It feels like a song without me  
and I am the small ears  
listening to it breathe.

Douglas Crets

The moon is a hooded monk,  
and poised above his lantern face

is a point of reference in the dark fabric,  
a star.

And if you were to reach up  
to grab it, it would feel

like the needle of a record player,  
pin prick or isolated dot

of pre-numbness. This singularity  
of all and nothing is the locus of the monk's

notions, thoughts, concentration-  
his dinner- a fish folded until it is pure fishness.

And being that he is all monkness  
they can float there indefinitely

against a seamless backdrop.

Jane Oslislo

### Permanence

They must have expected  
the demise of all  
that weather condition

because when we got news  
of the old grain bin's  
implosion

quaint machines were  
already sorting  
the greater mess into

more manageable  
stacks

Carter Smith



**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**

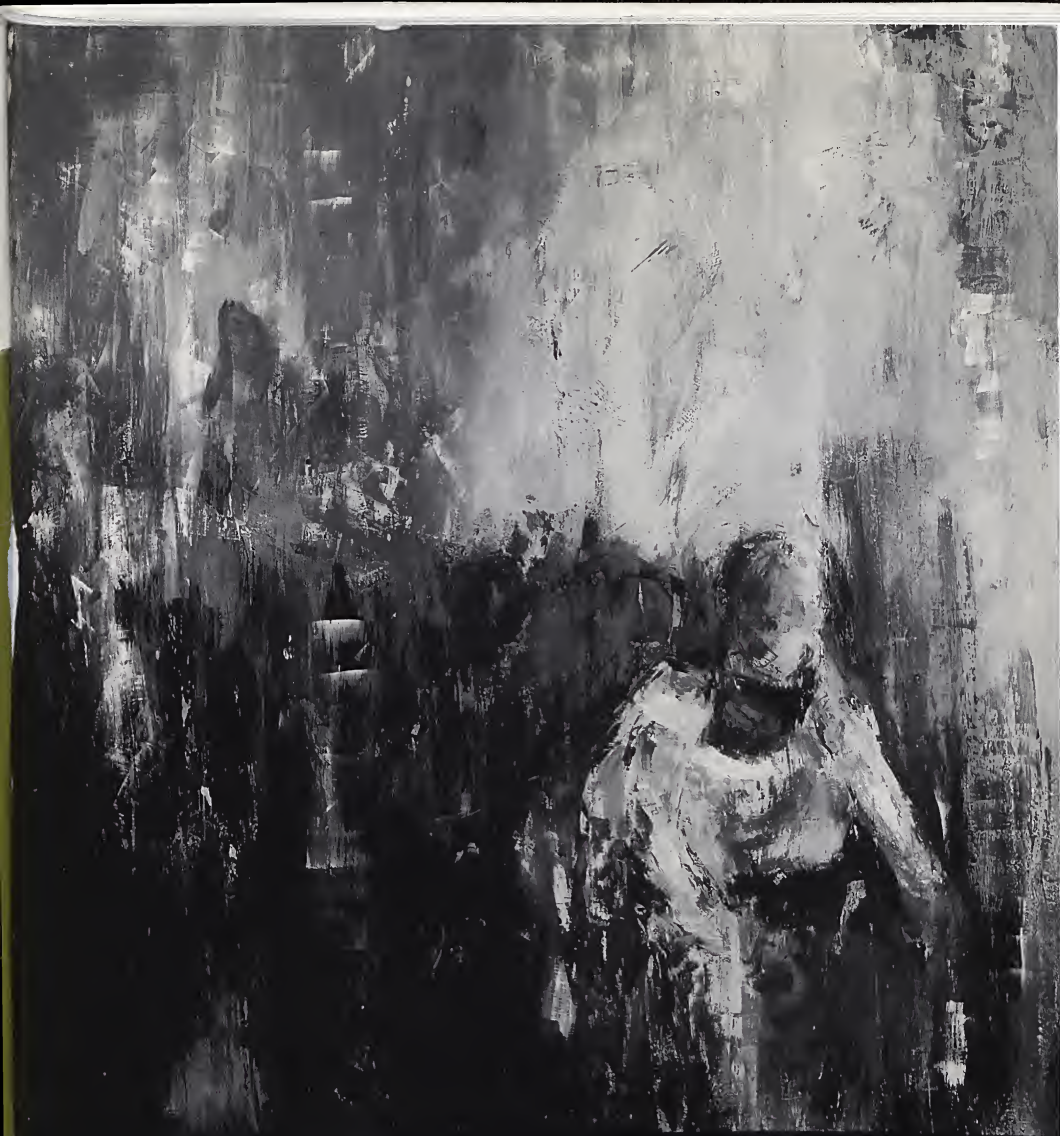


Fearless Freddie and His Wares 1

Christine LaPorte



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KEVIN PALME



# THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY  
SPRING 1998





Persons attempting to find  
a motive in this narrative  
will be prosecuted;  
persons attempting to find  
a moral in it will be  
banished; persons  
attempting to find a  
plot in it will be  
shot...



**All others will be smashed.**

By the order of editor,  
Per G.G., Chief of Ordnance



LH1  
W4  
S78  
1998

# THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

Spring 1998

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## Contents

### Art/Photography

Mark Twain Mouse.....	Ken Perkins.....	1
Untitled.....	Abdul Azeez Guice.....	7
Two Hats.....	Kristen Nicole Warren.....	8
Untitled.....	Dave Frisvold.....	15
Vigilant.....	Kristen Nicole Warren.....	16
Untitled.....	Kristen Nicole Warren.....	21
Untitled.....	Dave Frisvold.....	22
Untitled.....	Ken Perkins.....	29
Untitled.....	Katie Perry.....	30
Bound.....	Elizabeth Gray.....	35
Untitled Fragment with Thought Bubble.....	Elizabeth Gray.....	36
Untitled.....	Kristen Nicole Warren.....	39
Five Minutes of Contemplation.....	Elizabeth Kaleida.....	40
Untitled.....	Kristin Thompson.....	43

### Prose

Finish Line.....	Elizabeth O'Brien.....	9
brushfire.....	Warner D. May.....	19
alcohol.....	Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.....	24
Syzygy.....	Paula Decker.....	26
Falling.....	Nick.....	31
Creation Story Thought of While in Bed (or, Choose Your Own Adventure).....	Jane Oslislo.....	33
minority.....	Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.....	41

### Poetry

Chet Baker.....	Carter Smith.....	5
Automaton.....	Jeff Cook.....	6
Afterwards.....	Harli Johnson.....	6
Untitled.....	Patrick Patten.....	10
I think about ex-girlfriends who will call me again someday.....	Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.....	13
Glass on the Page.....	Paul Fyfe.....	14
[to which we all return].....	Rachel Childs.....	17
three trowlers cremate their friend and celebrate.....	Douglas Crets.....	18
My driver.....	Paul Fyfe.....	23
Morningside Park.....	Mark Sedgley.....	25
How It Speaks And He Listens.....	Douglas Crets.....	25
Borderland.....	Rachel Childs.....	27
remembrance of parties that used to bore me.....	Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.....	28
God made sweet love to me last night.....	Clinton Wilburn, Jr.....	32
Viewfinder.....	Paul Fyfe.....	34
the night I told her.....	Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.....	37
High School Romantics.....	Patrick Patten.....	37
Snapshot.....	Jeff Cook.....	38
America.....	Mark Sedgley.....	38
Deja Vu 111.....	Jeff Cook.....	42

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### Automaton (for Harli)

In this whole world of faces,  
grass, and the rising sun  
there are only two things  
which I truly hate

prejudice  
and  
love poems.

Jeff Cook

### Afterwards

I'm riding in my brother's car  
crossing the McKinley Washington  
Jr. Bridge. It stretches

out over the marsh, the marsh which  
was here all through that terrible night.  
Even though I wasn't thinking

of it then, it was here, moving  
easily in the dark, murmuring and  
rustling, layering the land with beauty.

Harli Johnson



Abdul Azeez Guice



**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Kristen Nicole Warren

Two Hats

## Finish Line

by Elizabeth O'Brien

Carrie woke just after sunrise from a gray, dreamless sleep to find himself lying on his back in the middle of the bed with both arms folded across his thin chest, one tucked snugly into each armpit. For the past few weeks, no matter how he fell asleep—whether on his side or his stomach—he woke up each morning squeezing himself like this, with both legs and feet pressed firmly together, determinedly pointed towards the foot of the bed. This morning was no different, and for a moment he lay still, too groggy yet to release himself from his own hold.

The tight feeling just above his temples reminded him that he had stayed up very late the night before. He'd come in from the barn and listened to the radio while he sat on the back porch. Agnes had followed him out there, her paws making a soft scuffing noise on the porch's wooden floor as she circled once, twice, three times before settling down in a tight ball to sleep at Carrie's feet. He'd hoped the old dog would be warm enough: it was early September, but already the night air was patched with cold. The news came on the radio, and after that the deep-voiced announcer had played a few George Gershwin songs. Carrie hummed along with the familiar tunes, occasionally bending down to stroke Agnes' speckled head as little tremors rippled through the old dog's body, making her legs twitch. He'd meant to write a letter to Gretchen—the pen and paper were on the rattan table in front of him. But instead he'd smoked his Marlboro Reds and drank cheap port from a coffee mug, the only clean cup in the house. Toward the bottom of the bottle, he at last felt the warm cloudiness of sleep fill his head. He'd hoisted himself up from the creaky sofa and gone inside to bed with Agnes at his heels.

The dim morning light filtering in through the two bedroom windows told Carrie that it was after seven, and time to get up. Reluctantly he pulled his hands from the warm nests of his armpits and sat up slowly, willing himself to throw the quilt off. He sat there for a moment, blinking the sleep from his eyes, before swinging his legs to the side of the bed and allowing his toes to meet the icy coolness of the bedroom floor. Despite her ever-worsening arthritis, Agnes quickly struggled up out of her fleece dog-bed at the first signs of life from Carrie. Her raspy tongue affectionately found his left kneecap and covered it in slobber as Carrie fumbled for his glasses on the bedside table, knocking over a bottle of pain killers in the search. He cursed under his breath. Where were those damn glasses? He could never seem to hang onto them. He'd gone through three pairs last year alone. Well, he thought, no matter really, he could drive without them. He squinted to pick up the spilled white tablets off the table top and scooped them back into the pill bottle, dropping one onto his tongue. Swallowing it down with a sip of water from the little glass he kept on the table just for this purpose, Carrie made out the time on the bedside clock: seven ten. He had a couple of hours before he had to be in town.

Carrie rose gingerly, causing a succession of loud snaps from his ankles and knees. The familiar, dull ache in his lower back began the moment he stood. Every morning, Carrie swore that he could feel each and every nerve in the muscles surrounding his three lowest vertebrae constrict, as though, by tightening themselves, they could ward off the pain that began somewhere deep within his core and inevitable flowered throughout his tailbone and into his lower back.

The pain was a result of a bad fall back in July of 1959. The filly had gone down at the third fence, breaking her left front leg and putting Carrie in the hospital for two months with



## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

with three smashed vertebrae. The doctors had fixed him up, and he'd been racing again by the winter, but the pain stayed with him. He grew so used to the sensation of a strong hand gripping his muscles that he took to emitting a loud groan from the back of his throat the very moment he felt it each morning. He groaned now, and, as always, it was not a protest: Carrie meant it as a sort of welcome, an announcement to the pain that he was ready. his wife, Gretchen, had never understood his groaning. when he'd rise at six a.m., headed for the barn and the five or six horses he would gallop before noon, Gretchen would feign sleep, her willowy back turned away from him as he pulled his boots on. Then, hearing her husband's guttural noise, she was immediately awake and glad for her chance to scold.

"Clarence, would you please not make that god awful noise, I'm trying to sleep here!" And then she was buried in the covers again, her eyes squeezed angrily shut, her ears annoyed and wary until they heard the door shut quietly behind him.

Carrie smiled ruefully as he pulled on a flannel workshirt and a pair of thick, denim overalls he'd left out on one of the two small chairs in his bedroom. Gretchen. What a piece of work. He'd met her, God, it must be over thirty years ago, when he'd run a horse of her father's down in Monmouth. She'd come to the winner's circle to see her father after the race, all dolled up in her little pink suit and that funny flowered hat, blond and beautiful and a t least three inches taller than he in her pink suede pumps. She'd been only just nineteen then, and as he clutched his silver cup, and the man snapped the picture, he'd wanted more than anything to remove her old dad form between them and feel her soft arm—he imagined it would be soft—against his.

It didn't take him long: three weeks later, shortly following seven gin and tonics and a slow dance, he saw all of Gretchen DuPont in a stall of her father's stable during the Hunt Cup Ball. Within a month they were married and living on her father's farm, and eight months later their daughter, Elizabeth, was born. On the weekends, Carrie was off running the old man's horses at Foxfield and Fairhill and just about every racetrack on the East Coast. Soon he managed to buy a little farm of his own where he trained a few horses, and they went for him. Carrie spent his time with the horses; Gretchen holed up in the house with the baby, content to steer clear of the barn. And for a while, they were happy together.

If ?  
you could  
just,  
lay on top of me  
for a day.  
I would be content with  
every moment  
that slipped,  
down  
your lips

Patrick Patten

Carrie laced up his boots and shuffled out through the hallway and into the bathroom, still musing over his wife. Agnes sat patiently on the landing, tail wagging, as he splashed icy water from the faucet onto his face. After vigorously running a toothbrush over his teeth—most of them false—Carrie straightened up, haltingly, and stole a look in the mirror. Same close-set, beady brown eyes staring out from below the swooping bushes of wiry eyebrows. He looked nearly the same, he supposed, as back then, when he'd married Gretchen. Sure, the tiny lines webbing his eyelids and the corners of his mouth were more pronounced than when he was younger. The hairline had receded and grayed, but his mouth was the same, solid mouth, lost in the thicket of his salt and pepper beard. Certainly he didn't look that much different, he was only fifty-eight—and if he did, he swiftly decided, it was because living with that Gretchen for almost thirty years had aged him. Thirty years with that woman! With her nagging, and arguing, always at him to give up racing. But he hadn't listened: he didn't stop until late in 1974, long after he'd tangled with that filly and begun the groaning that vexed Gretchen so. Only after he fell during a timber race and broke his femur in four places did he decide to work from the ground. Gretchen couldn't have been happier: she'd always thought it was much better to own race horses than to actually ride them. Well, what did she know? She rode like a sack of potatoes, anyway.

Agnes trotted ahead of him as they walked down the stairs and through the small, sparsely furnished living room whose walls were covered with dozens of photographs, glossy winner's-circle poses from perhaps a hundred different races. Carrie took a fleece vest from the closet and pulled it on as he scanned the finely printed lines under a few of the pictures hung by the front door. *Fenway Lad, O'Day up, First in the Gold Cup, 1976. Ol'Shotgun, Houghton up, First in the Maryland Stakes, 1983.* Carrie was in all of them, smiling like a fool, and often Gretchen too was there, looking chic and bored in her racing-day best, holding a sullen faced Elizabeth by the hand. It wasn't too long after these photos were taken, Carrie recalled, that Gretchen had started bringing Elizabeth to see the horses go less often. Pretty soon she stopped coming to the track altogether.

Agnes, he wet nose pressed against the glass of the front door, let out a high-pitched whine. Carrie pulled himself away from the photographs to open the front door for the hound, who gingerly stepped down off the front stoop and promptly squatted to relieve herself on the grass. Carrie walked out behind her into the September sunshine, filling his lungs with the crisp air. It was a beautiful morning—a morning that once he would've spent training in the ring at the old farm, or out galloping in the woods behind Bird's Pond. But today he needed to hurry up and get in and out of the barn and be at Fran's Diner on mainstreet (the only street, really) in town by nine o'clock. He was meeting Jim Wright there—an old friend, a lawyer, but today was not a social meeting.

The thought of meeting Jim there in that acrid-smelling, grease-sodden restaurant to sign the final divorce papers made Carrie's skin prickle beneath his vest as he and Agnes began their slow ascent of the hill that lead to the barn. He could scarcely believe that Gretchen was going through with it. Slackening his pace to allow Agnes time to thoroughly sniff a dirt-clod, he looked down the hill towards his little house. He'd always thought that living here would be temporary. It wasn't much of a place, just a one-bedroom guest house he rented for cheap so he could afford to keep the two horses with him. He was surprised that he had lived here as long as he had; it had been almost two years. Back when Gretchen had asked him to leave their farm, he'd been confused.

"Leave, what d'ya mean, leave?" He'd been out in the barn, shoeing a horse meant to run that weekend, when she'd told him he had to go. She stood there framed by the doorway of the stall, not wanting to come in, her hands hanging down at her sides. The sun was going



## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

down, and the evening light spilled out from behind her body, making it difficult for Carrie to see her face.

"You have to leave, the farm, today." She said, and her voice had a rough edge that made Carrie set the yearling's leg down and look at his wife. Her shoulder-length, ash-blond hair was coming out of the knot she'd made at the nape of her neck, and it surrounded her face in springy tendrils. Her steel gray eyes snapped with emotion.

"Gretchen, if it's the way the horses are going lately, don't worry, I'm sure I can pick it up..." he began, but she quickly raised one hand and simultaneously shook her head, her eyes closed, to silence him.

"I don't care about the damn horses, Carrie," she said in a smaller voice before walking out of the barn. "I want a divorce."

So he had moved out—taking Agnes with him, despite Gretchen's protests—and rented this little place. Truthfully, it was all he could afford: he had racked up a lot of debts over the past five years, since the horses had started to not run so well, and he'd needed to scrape together money for feed and hay and such. In fact, the debts—plus back taxes, which he had been neglecting for a few years—had grown so large that Gretchen had sold off most of the horses once Carrie left the farm. He'd been furious, and he'd showed up there at three a.m. after he'd had a few whiskey and sodas—short on the soda—to have it out with her. But despite his seemingly endless pounding, Gretchen wouldn't open the door to talk to him. A week later, a boy who worked at the farm had brought his two remaining horses—Carrie's old mare, Indiana Prime, and her yearling—to him at his new house, accompanied by the first set of divorce papers. He'd stashed them, unsigned, under his bed in a box with several dusty old cups and trophies. He decided to wait it out, and he worked a lot in the barn with the young horse. She couldn't be calling it quits after thirty years.

But last week Jim Wright had called him on Gretchen's behalf—a dirty move—and asked him to come a sign the final papers. Carrie thought briefly of protesting. Maybe he could call her or write a letter telling her to meet him somewhere. But he soon thought better of it: that woman was so damn stubborn, she had never listened to him before, and she certainly wasn't going to start now. He agreed to meet her lawyer. It shouldn't take long. There was nothing to decide, really. Gretchen would get the farm and go on rambling about on it alone, except when Elizabeth and her husband came to visit, which wasn't very often. All Carrie had to do was sign.

The old mare and her foal raised their heads, turning curious eyes upon him as he swung the door to the small barn open. Agnes scuttled in ahead, anxious to reach the feed bins should there be any excess grain left lying on the ground for her to gnaw. As Carrie passed the yearling's stall, the horse shoved its head in one quick thrust over the top of the stall door and stood regarding him.

"Hey there, bugger," Carrie ran his palm under the downy whiskers of the animal's muzzle. He meant to stepplechase him year after next if he was strong enough. The yearling tilted his head forward so Carrie could better scratch underneath his chin. He needed to hurry up and get these horses fed and turned out and head into town. But for a long moment, he leaned against the young horse's neck, lost in the sweet, musky odor of the chestnut mane that was the same shade as his mother's.

i think about ex-girlfriends who will call me again someday

i would kick off my pastel shoes,  
chuck taylors of course.  
getting into her bed night after night,  
yet each time felt special  
for some reason.

the same cd spinning in its player,  
we'd make the same pronouncements,  
the same nervous unaffected groping.

love interrupted by ringing telephones  
or somebody coming downstairs.  
finally i would leave too soon,  
a goodbye hug lasting a moment too long,  
a little too much emphasis on the question  
when i would ask her to call me.

saying goodbye to the neighbors,  
names i still didn't know.  
fumbling for my keys  
and driving down the familiar street  
on the verge of laughter  
or else, tears.

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### Glass on the Page

Say that I'm risking it: what a wonder  
you haven't stopped reading already —  
another writer, another risk and aren't  
we all just heroes for living gutter  
to gutter?

Remember that I'm like you,  
and we're writing from the indelible  
source, making primal ideas our luggage  
and history our red-slatted boxcar.  
What risk is this, really?

Asleep in the  
hay — dead-cold seminomad, gloss-eyed fucker,  
rocked by the trucking train roll or the boot  
of police in the alley. Wake up, genius,  
you wonderful bloody genius! Why won't

you talk to me anymore? And who started  
writing this poem in the first place?  
There is no emissive death for the mind.  
Unless you're an infinite reader, you've  
already forgotten

every strophe that  
moved you into thinking there was rhythm  
in poetry that's no longer a song.  
Your vocabulary is codified,  
mental processes become crystal  
by age twenty-five —

why the hell are you  
still reading? Don't get hussy, only magnets  
have real resolve, unlike our stretched wire.  
Who's writing this poem? You? I think  
you should end it; this glass house is a morgue.

Paul Fyfe





Dave Frisvold



**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Kristen Nicole Warren

Vigilant

[to which we all return]

you ask "where do we go" and i'll tell you:  
the old man made it out there

how i can't say; by miracle  
 or perhaps a strong wind, but he stands now  
 in the cemetery of steely aberdeen  
 eyes fixed on the horizon and maybe higher  
 as he leans on his gnarled cane  
 the mist grey in his hair. sometimes he looks down  
 at the graves, weighing them in his mind over and over  
 [how much dirt, wood and time add up;  
 how stone is often the victor over earth and bent backs]  
 and when he reaches out to touch a granite slab  
 there is a change: his hands cease to shake quite so violently  
 he is still and cold  
 and palely serene. the wind shifts. he is stone.  
 [years later when you and i sit here in  
 the dark of night and winter, warmed by lamps and quilts  
 you ask

“where do we go”  
and i remember this: i remember where]

Rachel Childs

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

three trowlers cremate their friend  
and celebrate

I

Rosetu, Sosen, and silent Shunkin-Lu  
walk with old smart Kuan  
into the teahouse garden,  
stomachs filled with the morning food  
of two eggs each and strips of sea bass  
taken by their own ocean-gritty hands.

Low grass burns beneath the oil lamps, it is marvelous.  
The lamps have been laid out before dawn  
for the fisherman coming in with the rush of the ebb,  
out of the sun on their wormworn junks.

II

A crane floats out of the mist of the harbor  
spreading his wings to reach the flatland.  
They have come out of the garden with only Kuan  
held in their heads. The last thing:  
a folded-arm sailor, burning in the oven.

Venus nurturing through the bamboo slats.

III

As they cross the bridge  
Sosen gazes up at Two-Pigs  
and coughs before he speaks:

Remember, dear friends  
hard-drinker, Kuan?

Several nights by my arm  
coming home sour

Sobbing and grinning  
with his wine teeth

At the simple moon?  
Rat. In trouble more

than once I can count  
out of the harbor.

One spring four waves  
crushing into the hull

like frothing deer.

## IV

They come stumbling home yelling and yowling.  
Slapping backs and asses. A night heron  
flaps over their hair on the way to a school  
of sea perch rustling too close to the shallows.

They howl and they spit. Rain and the spirit  
dancing in the mist and heart.  
Each man holds the other upright. Quiet Lu  
enraged, throws his wine bottle against the rocks.

They piss down the sides of the boats.  
Lu removes his clothes and begins to cry  
tearing his knees on the dock.

Sosen and Rosetu lift him from the wood  
and carry him to the house not too far away.  
One lamp on and many blankets. The moon.

Douglas Crets

## brushfire

by Warner D. May

The blinds flew up as he adjusted his eyes to the dawning light outside. *Dammit, should've closed my eyes.* He looked down and across the street and looked at the pile of dead leaves rotting in the gutter. He wished someone would clean them up. He felt the warm, dusty cigarette smoke dance in his lungs one more time. She snored.

Lindsay didn't snore when they got married. He wondered how long it had been since he first heard the miserable retching, burping sound. *Funny how when you get married all the personal things you now have to share seem neat at first. You're still on the high of having someone all to yourself. But, after a while all those little things turn into pet peeves, then they become the things that drive you crazy.* He pushed the thought out of his head. He simply didn't want to think about it. It was too early in the morning.

Now it had gotten to the point that he couldn't ever sleep with her doing that. Even if he got to sleep first, she'd wake him up. He'd maybe get three hours of fitful sleep a night. He couldn't care, he had no choice.

He leaned against the edge of the picture window. He exhaled the cloud of his mouth again and crushed the butt in the ashtray. *That pile of leaves really does make the whole street look bad.* He thought about how proud he was to live in a nice area of the city, to afford a nice spacious apartment with trees on the street outside. *Except some bastard cleaning his sidewalk*



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

*and just left the leaves in the gutter. I hate it when people don't finish their jobs.*

He turned away from the window and saw her figure expand with the breath that would soon become a monster as it left her mouth. As he walked across the room his feet caught the coldness of the wood floor in between the rugs. *Damn, I wish I could find my slippers.* Beautiful hardwood floors didn't seem so great now. He leaned against the door to take the pressure off the latch to ensure that it would not make any noise.

He walked down the upstairs hallway past the spare room. They once believed there might be a little child in there but the hospital tests told them no, there would never be a baby in that room. He shrugged his shoulders, *kids cost too much, and they're a pain anyway.*

His slippers were peeking out from under the kitchen table. *Thank goodness, the floors seem colder down here.* The kitchen window looked out onto the same place the bedroom window did and he could now see the height of the pile of leaves. He sighed, walked over to the coffee machine and got it going. The silence was broken by the snoring sound the coffee machine made as it sucked the water into itself. *I can't escape for a minute, can I?*

He thought about what he had to do at work until he remembered it was Saturday. He thought about what he would do today. Maybe sleep, when she woke up. *It's not her fault, she really can't help it.* He remembered how he used to look forward to falling asleep in that bed, not because of the sex but because of the feeling he got from her falling asleep in his arms as he too fell asleep. He smiled. They had so many good memories. Before, it seemed like they couldn't help but have fun. The friends they had were always around and they did so many crazy things. *It's different now.* The crazy friends are gone. He'd tried to bring the excitement they had then into the marriage. *Maybe it's just that two people can only be original around each other for so long.*

The coffee pot was full. He would finish it by noon. A little groan escaped as he lifted himself out of the chair. He liked to put the cream and sugar into the cup first so as he poured it in, the black liquid would bounce off the bottom of the cup an astonishing light brown. The chair by the window was to become the haven for his butt as he passed his time looking out onto the street. Due to Lindsay's snoring he found himself here almost every morning. Eventually, he forced himself to swipe a cushion off of the couch to put in the kitchen table chair. These days his butt went to sleep less quickly.

He lit a cigarette and set the coffee in the windowsill. The leaves stared at him with their own blank faces. They didn't talk. Neither did he. He imagined the moment when the man put them in their shallow grave. The man, with one final push, cleared the sidewalk just as his wife called for him to come to dinner, and would have looked up at his apartment, looked down at the leaves, and walked inside. *No big deal, I would have done the same thing.*

*But how hard is it to pick up one pile of filthy leaves? How long does it take, five, ten minutes at the most?* He sat, gulped his coffee, and took a drag off his cigarette. The morning paper flew out of the window of the little red Corsica. He suppressed the groan as he got up this time.

There he was, the stereotypical man coming out of his door, in his bathrobe and slippers in the early winter, going to get the paper. But he walked past the paper and into the street and right up to the leaves. Kneeling down he placed his cigarette at the base of the pile. They weren't so wet. He pivoted, walked back across the street and picked up the paper.



Kristen Nicole Warren



**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Dave Frisvold

### My driver

The eyes are the windshield for the brain  
and my driver, furious with the  
festering traffic

seems stretched through his door from  
the outside-in, head lurching after his  
one fingered hand

out the window and pushing off the steering wheel  
with deep and vulgar screams, "Hey, you fuck!"  
and slams across

three lanes to find unlikely avenues between  
stopped fire trucks, sirens stopped  
spinning a long time

ago when the now mulling rubber men arrived in masks  
and yellow helmets. We shoot by, firefighters  
half watching half

screaming as we beat over their limp hoses: "Outta  
the way, asshole!" My driver spares no one.  
Behind the glasss

wall I raise my large gray-thin paper to veil  
the longitudinal blur — cabs and trucks  
falling behind us.

"What are we going to, a funeral?" I ask him  
as we slide synchronized across the wide vinyl seats  
in the deeper air

smelling of bus, stale hot dogs and paper.  
Over the pages, his body hunches forward and  
two strict eyes

appear in the rear-view. "What?" he asks.  
"Truck," I say. We swerve against pinched tires  
screaming like murder.

My driver is watching the road again, detached as  
an iceberg. Returning to the paper, I've  
opened the obituaries.

Paul Fyfe

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

alcohol

by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

i. July, 1995. Ashland, Oregon. Long before my conversion to Islam. I'd been drinking a lot during the summer, had been partying with a group of jocks who'd attended high school with me.

It had been another hazy party among many, in a large house on the outskirts of town, packed with inebriated, dancing, crazily festive people. I'd been drinking with a football player who had impressed everybody in high school with stellar play, by being selected to the All-State team. "Let's see what you learned in college," he told me. He handed me a cup full of red ale and I downed it.

"You drink," I told him, and he downed a Henry Weinhard's.

"Keep drinking," he told me and I downed another cup, room spinning, growing more chaotic. I grabbed at a woman walking past, just because I could. Laughter. Jostling with other people half-playfully and half-violently, drinking more and more, smoking weed, monosyllabic conversation, egging others on to drink and being egged on in turn, my reality a beautiful drunken collage of people, words, music, movement.

ii. October 1997. Douz, Tunisia. A month after I took my *shahadah*. I'd come to Douz with two friends to camp in the Sahara Desert and our guide, Kamel, impressed everybody by showing us his name in our *Lonely Planet* book. He spoke English fairly well and promised to teach me some Arabic, which he never did. Kamel told me we'd drink some date wine in the desert, which I refused. "Why not?" he asked.

"Because I'm Muslim."

"Prophet Muhammad say it's ok to drink!" he snapped. "He say drinking ok in moderation."

"Untrue," I told him.

"I'm Muslim, man!" Kamel said. "I'm Muslim and I drink!" I shook my head without speaking.

In the desert, Kamel tried to convince me again to drink the date wine, chastising me again when I again refused. He made a couple of passes at the woman I was traveling with, which permanently formed her impression of Muslims, then borrowed my Swiss Army knife to prepare dinner and left it out in the Sahara that night.

iii. December 1997. Venice, Italy. A Catholic priest had been visiting Casa Artom for a week now. He spoke no English, only Italian. He'd worked as the cardinal's secretary, and impressed everybody by showing us a pocket calendar featuring a picture of him walking between the cardinal and pope in a procession. This night was one of the group's last in Venice and the priest had brought a few bottles of wine to celebrate. I sat talking with him about religion for a short while before he tried to entice me to drink. "I know Muslims who drink!" he said. "I know Muslims who blow up buildings," I retorted.

The priest encouraged everybody to drink more while he continued to swig the wine he'd brought. Eventually he whipped out his calendar again, displaying himself near the pope. One of the Casa Artom men, very drunk, grew wide-eyed by such a proximity to greatness and asked to keep it, so he could show people later that he had met somebody who knew the pope.

Later the priest noticed a girl walking upstairs in a flesh-colored tank top. Wide-eyed, he asked if she was naked. He seemed disappointed to learn that she wasn't, and took another drink from his glass.

### Morningside Park

My life is hidden.  
 As obscenely, obscured perception upon assumption.  
 Morningside Park is my residence.  
 Its where I slink, where I stay, where I pray.  
 So, Unwilling but longful fingers are clinched, Interlocked at Morningside Park.

My soul is suffocated and,  
 Leaping bounds, or the minuscule mistakes, predominate the conversation here.  
 Morningside Park hovers like the air on one of those sultry days.  
 It sticks only to those places you find so hard to believe.

My mind is closed.  
 Yet, Morningside park is open all the time,  
 just climb the fence  
 To see the forgotten and lost dreams  
 Smeared upon the cheap sheet rock and dull brick.  
 At Morningside Park I exist.

Mark Sedgley

### How It Speaks And He Listens

He thinks of saying no to earth.  
 All day it is around him, offering  
 suggestions in sips, like *Night air*  
*is your soft breath*

Sometimes *Clay is blood*  
*tracked into your house* At night  
 he repeats what earth has done with him  
 in song; the way elderly couples happily

make love. Not succinct, but complete  
 like any pristine fluid, rich the way it slides  
 from mischance to hope and back  
 by way of trying.

Douglas Crets



## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

Syzygy

by Paula Decker

"It's not like yesterday" one of them said, in a tone more suited to a confession than a simple statement of obvious fact. There were just a few of them this bright winter morning, floating expectantly in the sapphire water of the bay as if they didn't know that it was January 2nd and the rest of the world was huddling by their firesides. They had been drawn here from all over the island, tourists and locals alike, by the memory of what had been, yesterday, the first day of 1998. They dotted the bay like seeds in a watermelon, following the curve of the beach, waiting for the event that had brought them so much joy, yesterday.

On that New Year's morning, new arrivals to the beach had found themselves in an almost alien environment. People were crowded together along the vegetation that separated the beach from the wilderness like lemmings in reverse, as if they were trying to escape from the ocean but were spellbound by it's sight. The Caribbean was like an angry kitten attempting to mimic the lion's roar; it's waters, usually as smooth and clear as glass, were ruffled by ten-foot waves. The fact that the waves never occurred on this particular beach, or even in this particular ocean, was what transformed their presence into an event. They overtook the beach, driving the hordes of pale, puffy tourists into the fringe and onto the black, sun-baked rocks to marvel at and comment on the spectacle.

An emaciated woman in a black and gold metallic bikini had whined and complained to her husband and everyone around them; she had expected the beach to resemble the postcards she had gleefully sent to envious (she hoped) friends back in Jersey. "But Harry, you said this island *never* had waves. You said it was always *calm* here!" she had droned, half-heartedly pathetic. Her husband, as well as everyone else within earshot, had ignored her, as they had both known he would. He was concentrating on the waves and wishing he was twenty years younger so he could experience firsthand what he was forced to be content with vicariously. One observer, lying flat on her stomach in the shade, raised her silver-rimmed sunglasses to watch the customary sapphire color of the water deepen to azure with the force of the waves. She smiled involuntarily at the sudden memory of a certain pair of blue eyes, the color of the city sky in summer, that she had seen darkened with at depth of feeling she now saw embodied in the pounding drive of the water on the rocks at the end of the beach.

Those in the water, in the reality of the miracle, were feeling the rare glory of being carefree and alive—brilliantly, buoyantly alive. They felt the power of the waves, held tenuously in check by Neptunian restraint, advance mercilessly, relentlessly toward them, surge under them, and continue past them like a destructive machine: pitiless, faceless, and uncaring. This was the impression those on the beach received. The lucky wave-chasers did not view their adversaries as heartless, mechanical, or even simply as natural phenomena. When experienced face-to-face, these waves were vibrant, dynamic, entities who must be respected and dealt with accordingly. The variety of their shapes, the simple, primal rhythm of their formation and approach, the vivacity and strength with which they lifted their playmates, all left fleeting impressions of a powerful, yet beneficent life force that solidified with each passing wave.

Those in the water colored their shared experience with various emotions and thoughts. One of them, a young local who was entertaining the idea that he was a glorious, bronzed, lustworthy sun-god, was using the mighty feat of bodysurfing to impress naive young tourists. The reality that he was a scrawny, pompous idiot who was only slightly more tan than



## borderland

i didn't stare; we are taught in youth not to  
 but in a second glance, sight took sound's place  
 from across the aisle of a subway car. amid the shriek  
     of rails and metal, dulling the music in headphones,  
 her hands signed, whispered words to her watchful companion —  
 a joke, a playful promise,  
 a code in the dark: i sat in the teeming light just feet away  
 saw at the corner of my vision how gently she nestled into his shoulder  
     half-smiling half-asleep  
     in spite of the cacophony which surrounded her;  
 i alone leaned my forehead against the stolid icy window,  
 felt the ache for warmth,  
 the inner pulse, the borderland  
 that summons you in no blunt language.

Rachel Childs

themselves was not lost on these objects of desire, however, and they each rebuffed his advances just as they floated over each wave: gently, gracefully and emphatically. The result of their delicacy was that their pursuer's dignity (or lack thereof) remained as undisturbed as the smooth ocean floor. Another participant, self-detached from this ongoing saga, was a middle-aged who had come to the island seeking respite from the death throes of this twenty-year marriage; he found his solace and only peace in the relentless, impartial rhythm of the ocean.

A young woman on her first trip to the island found that the one thing she valued most about her experience that New Year's Day was the solidarity she felt with the handful of strangers that were her fellows in the brilliant adventure. She relished the approach of a particularly large and fierce-looking wall of water, slate-blue in the distance. The crowd in the water, floating together and talking with cheerful, unassumed camaraderie, would glimpse the wave at the same instant, heads snapped up and towards the open ocean like a pack of dogs at an unfamiliar footstep. Then with one voice they would raise a cry that was heard by every onlooker hiding in the brush and then disappeared into the dizzyingly endless blue above them. They cried in celebration of the chance to conquer one more child of Neptune and Mother Nature. The cried in anticipation, as they raced with one body toward the wave. They cried in the sheer simple joy of a brief, glorious moment, one which none of them could ever erase from their memories.

"God, I wish it was like yesterday."

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

reminiscence of parties that used to bore me

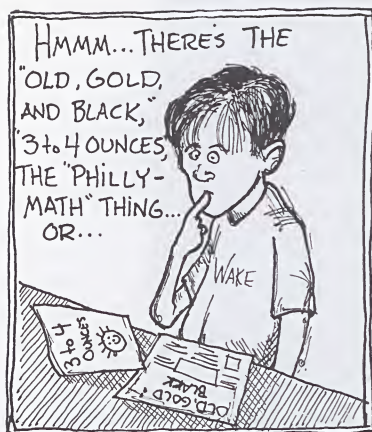
bored at a party in italy.  
white people dancing awkwardly to undanceable music,  
prince's, "little red corvette."  
like countless boring parties from my past.  
different now as a muslim, not drinking,  
realizing how stupid they look when i'm sober.

in high school, at a dance club called remix in medford.  
so stoned that the world turned pastel.  
cursing my inability to dance,  
eyeing a blonde vixen who moved like a serpent  
tight acid-washed jeans hiking up her ass,  
purposeful cuts by the pocket line, a cherished taste of flesh,  
wishing i could have a piece of that.

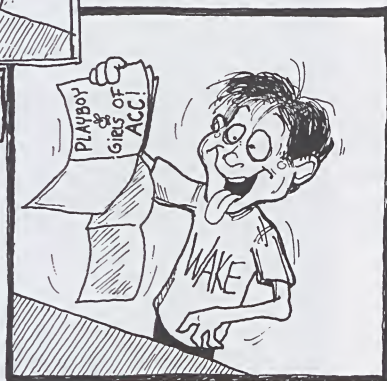
parties where everyone talks, where nobody says anything,  
where people end up watching tv, where i would decide that people are *interesting* and ask  
enough personal questions to make anybody nervous.  
the meeting of eyes that signals attraction, my own uncertainty,  
a broken conversation, a few bored smiles,  
avoiding ex-girlfriends, swigging beer in pure arrogance, harrassing nearby women,  
standing around a fraternity lounge being introduced to people i don't want to know.  
the standard encouragement—*she likes you*—whispered half-encouraging, half-mocking.

viewing the party as a muslim.  
no longer nervous, no goals here, nobody to impress.  
knowing that this was once important to me,  
these parties that bored and intrigued me in the past,  
when the parties of the future held more drink, more women, more dances to flounder  
through.

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross



WRITTEN BY MATT NIMCHUK  
DRAWN BY KEN PERLINS



**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Katie Perry



## Falling

by Nick

These old men of the past speak to me as I try to fall asleep. Whisper, whisper, in my left and now my right ear. Then the music begins: deep, poetic background. Another German, starting from the elements once again. Who does he think he is anyway? Perhaps some sort of god, or Prometheus. *Duhhhm, dum dum Duhhhm, Duhhhm...* That's it, keep building. The seventh, is it? Very fitting I guess. The perfect number. On the seventh day he rested. Why the seventh day? I wish I could, too. Maybe I'm like one of those Hemingway heroes who likes to eat and drink and who cannot sleep at night. Well, the room's dark and it sure as hell ain't clean, so I guess I'm not after all.

I can't believe I saw her again today. I wonder if she knows. "Mr. Studious," she said as she tossed her hair around, freed it from its cover as I was reading by the stairs. Under cover. I'm the one under cover. I don't think she knows. There's no way she could know. Oh well, maybe this way I'll like her even more, create her in my own image. Dress her up, maybe even down if I'm bored. No, can't do that. *Duhhhm, dum dum Duhhhm, Duhhhm.* Back to the beginning already? Damn I wish I could sleep, wish this would end. I wonder why I never remember when it ends, when my thoughts finally wind down into slippery surrealism. You know, like when you see black hawks flying over rocks and crags, shells exploding in the trenches, gray men thinking with their pipes, or two lovers sleeping in bed.



## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

God made sweet love to me last night

oooooh mmmmph

God made sweet love to me last night  
it started with a whisper  
He spoke softly to my spirit  
His words slid into my ear  
down through my heart  
and seeped into my soul

mmmph mmmph mmmph  
He made me scream  
and shout  
oh oh oh oh Lord  
yes yes thank ya thank ya Lord  
have mercy

Yeah the Lord made sweet love to me last night  
He came right on time to make sure that I slept right

Clinton Wilburn, Jr.

**Creation Story Thought of While in Bed  
(or, Choose Your Own Adventure)**

by Jane Oslislo

One day an old lazy god was sitting around in his underwear. Now, this was the god of the laundry room of the DeHart apartment complex located on the corner of North Ave. and DeHart Pl., Elizabeth, N.J. Since his main responsibilities consisted of lint control and receiving sock sacrifice, he grew jaded in his luxury. One night while he was watching the galaxies spin in the washers' glass doors, he saw a story-life going on in one of the furthest planes. And the washer spoke:

Once there was a man born in a tube. He had no sense of the beginning or end of this tube. As far as he knew, he was in the smack dab middle of it. He imagined himself moving in one direction in this tube, and in doing so, did it. Air was his grease, and he glided in one direction, not turning around because the tube fit his body pretty snugly. He imagined himself a green vine, and when his body would settle on the red black rust of the pipe, he would use this vine to pull his frictioning body in his chosen direction. He would glide and settle. Glide and settle. He finally grew weary of this and imagined the pipe vertical, and he would fall speedily, every now and then seeing some kind of small light glimmer before him, or maybe catch a drift of fresh air. Without warning, he found himself hanging off the end of this tube, his fingers powerfully gripping the rim. Below him, absolute outer space, galaxies, stars, swirling cosmos, all that jazz. Having nothing better to do, he let go.

#1 And fell. For a while. Coldly and smoothly past planets and colors until thud, he landed on dark terrain. When he looked above him, searching for his pipe in the sky, he saw the black circular end of it, the hole he fell from, just another space between stars. And then he forgot that they were all the ends of tubes. He only saw how many spaces there were between the stars. Then he only saw how many stars. (Then he only saw stars.)

#2 And fell. For a while. He closed his eyes and felt the nothing, this man, this body, falling and feeling nothing but his own skin. He thought without words, is this necessary? This moment when everything changed, this replayed eternity, felt good to him, and he smiled.

#3 And fell. Forever. The gods stared and nodded at the glass and sipped off his Bud. He rubbed his back as he stood up, then winced, trudging down the hall. He felt a woman in Panama City kick and curse a dryer that had eaten her money. He grimaced. He searched and felt another woman enjoying a spring-smelling load as she wrapped her wet son in a towel, and felt, better. He dressed himself and proceeded on foot to the local IHOP to make the deal with Joe and Miguel about the Chinese restaurant. Over grilled cheeses, patty melts, and Newport, they discussed the deal, but the memory of the falling man nagged at him. He thought of the man's face, eyes wide open, looking up then down, down then up. The god laughed to himself and thought, Ah, another lost to the Void.

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### Viewfinder

The viewfinder card  
doesn't work without  
the blinding machine.

Against red plastic oculars  
the eyes squint  
to determine

stereoptic resolve  
of a dark  
blue scene.

A spring loaded click  
sends opposing plates,  
one up one down,

to crank in  
the next frame  
of the slow story,

quickly focused  
with the dying ring  
of the trigger.

There is a need  
to see the whole,  
which is otherwise

impossible without  
sixteen eyes  
and tunnel vision.

Paul Fyfe



Bound

Elizabeth Gray



Elizabeth Gray

Untitled Fragment with Thought Bubble



the night I told her

The night I told her,  
a cool breeze blew through the valley.  
I heard her crying over the phone,  
asking why,  
then drove down to the park.

The smell of barbeque permeated  
the black evening, and the sycamores  
reached across the walkway for me,  
as I walked down the path alone,  
each step dislodging a pebble  
from its natural resting place.

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

High School Roamantics

No one saw the sun falling  
slowly  
like syrup  
over the edge of space.  
We just felt our feet get hot,  
and the car become claustrophobic.  
The colors turned pastel on the back seat passenger side windows.  
And my whole body was itching on the cloth fabric.

Patrick Patten

## THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

### Snapshot

The kiss was good  
but brutal  
smashing lips to pulp  
and peeling mystery  
into action  
attraction and gravity  
grabbing me this way.  
A trick.  
A thought to fall  
gratefully,  
to the floor,  
to feel this acuteness  
again, before the facts arrive  
before the cigarette,  
before the day  
breaks and the dawn  
surrenders  
too.

Jeff Cook

### America

Who the fuck are you?  
Other than a trite notion.  
A sociologically, economically, and generationally excused bigot.

Say it. Please say it.  
Call me a nigger! Call me a coon!  
Who the fuck am I to you, America?

Think for once, accept for once, in your dismally habitual life.  
America, I think that you need to kiss the lips of a caramel skinned wonder.  
Shake the honest hand of a midnight sky black man.

A man who knows that King's dreams aren't realized.  
A man who didn't care to sit at the front of the bus.  
Nor did he have a desire to march on Washington.

But as a black man, knows that a Louis, or a Marcus, or a Malcolm,  
could only be the product of a white society.  
A man who holds a profound understanding of what you mean when you say  
"we" America.

Mark Sedgley



Kristen Nicole Warren

**THREE TO FOUR OUNCES**



Elizabeth Kaleida

Five Minutes of Contemplation



## minority

by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

i. some friends brought me to a black baptist church during my freshman year of college. the singing, the old ladies standing up shouting "thank you jesus! oh lawd, thank you jesus!", the suave and fiery preacher, the sermon interrupted by shouts and emphatic amens all overwhelmed me, and one of my friends, a black man, remarked that now i knew all the stereotypes were true. walking out of the church that morning, a well-dressed little boy wearing thick black-rimmed glasses remarked to his mother, "look mom, a white person!" and pointed at me. his mother warned him to never say anything like that again, all the while keeping an uncertain smile on her lips.

ii. three years later, three white people with overflowing camping bags draped across their backs, dragging sleeping bags behind them, waddled conspicuously through the streets of gabes, tunisia. groups of black and arab schoolgirls politely yelled in high, shrill voices *bonjour, madame!* or *bonjour, monsieur!* we turned down a side street, searching for a telephone, and the children's eyes lit up with some strange combination of respect and amazement. they said their bonjours, sticking out their hands for me to shake. obviously an area that saw little tourism, we were made celebrities by virtue of the color of our skin. *would their people receive this reception in white america?*

i sat on the steps outside a cramped shop as my friends used the pay phone within, and the arab children, elementary-school aged, perched on a short wall beside me, not speaking, just gaping at me. i glanced at them occasionally and smiled, but mainly stared at the houses across the street, unable to speak french, and they ignored my one arabic question, *asmeetak?* after a short time, i reached into my neckpouch and fished around for a gleaming 100 lire coin, handed it to a well-dressed arab boy next to me, wearing thick black-rimmed glasses. *lire, d'italia,* i said, and he scampered away. his friends surrounded him instantly, examining both sides of the beautiful italian coin. my friends finished with phone and we walked off, said our *au revours*, leaving the boys to show their parents what the white trespassers had given them.

iii. whites were seen more frequently in matmata, and the children were better prepared. a small group surrounded us, making scribbling motions in the air, asking us for pens—*penna! penna!* finally i'd found the opportunity to use an arabic word i'd neglected. *imshee! imshee!* i said it gruffly, watched the children scamper and curse at me in arabic. fifteen steps later i had a change of heart—it's *only one lousy pen*. i reached into my pocket, turned slowly as the children again surrounded me, pushing each other aside with every hand outstretched. i handed one my blue and yellow university of michigan debate pen, a souvenir from a summer of teaching debate to high school students. the young beggars took it wordlessly, hands still open for more, more. but i only had one more pen—without the pen, no poetry.

maybe they needed the pen for school. maybe one of the kids, using the michigan debate pen, would become a scholar, attend a university, look up the website written on the foreign pen to discover what this "michigan debate" is all about.

the children's eyes followed us as we walked into the warm matmata night, air filled with spices and chicha smoke, eyes filled not with respect or amazement, but the disappointment of having received only one pen.



### THREE TO FOUR OUNCES

## Deja Vu 111

[illegible]

Somewhere right now Hamlet is dying for lack of a better idea.

Jeff Cook



Kristin Thompson





**COVER COURTESY OF  
DAVID DWYER**

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